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# Annual

of the

Association for Mormon Letters,

1995

Papers from 1993-94

Edited by  
Lavina Fielding Anderson

Association for Mormon Letters  
Provo, Utah  
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## INTRODUCTION

This edition of the *Annual*, which collects primarily papers given in 1993 and 1994, is a manifestation of the association's revitalization and current health. From a single paper presented in 1988, the amount of critical attention focused on Mormon literature and sponsored by the Association for Mormon Letters has increased steadily. The 1994 *AML Annual*, handsomely designed and produced in two volumes by Steven P. Sondrup, retiring executive secretary, included fifteen presentations involving nineteen participants by 1992. The thirty-two papers published here were presented, with two exceptions, in 1993 and 1994.

This year's *Annual* publishes the first annual Visiting Scholar Lecture, an innovation for the Association for Mormon Letters. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich presented this lecture, originally with slide illustrations, to an overflow audience in January 1994 in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building.

In both the 1994 and the 1995 volumes, it is apparent that Virginia Sorensen in particular is amassing an impressive body of critical scrutiny, something of an irony considering the fact that her works are almost all out of print. Her death in December 1991 was a loss to Mormon letters. Maurine Whipple, author of the powerful Mormon novel, *The Giant Joshua*, died in April 1992, but the exploration of her works also continues in both 1994 and 1995. Clinton F. Larson's death in the summer of 1994 is also a great loss to Mormon poetry.

Triggered by the vigorous and thoughtful presidential addresses of Bruce W. Jorgensen and Richard H. Cracroft (*Annual* 1994), essays with a critical focus have become increasingly important, and the criticism section of this year's annual contains five essays of unusually high quality. They provide a solid contribution to the insightful analyses of Mormon fiction, poetry, drama, humor, biography, and autobiography that AML members have come to expect. Three personal essays on feminism round-out the volume.

Although not lending itself to reproduction in a proceedings, the Association for Mormon Letters also sponsored a Boston meeting in October 1993. According to Jim Coleman, one of the organizers, this conference began with an evening session on October 22 which presented Barbara Bennion's play, *Progeny*, and ballads, folksongs, and traditional hymns by Lisa R. Arrington. On October 23, a living morning panel continued the debate sparked in the July issue of *Sunstone*, which published the Jorgensen-Cracroft presidential addresses. Jim chaired a panel consisting of Jenny Atkinson, Ann Edwards Cannon, Linda Hoffman Kimball, Tina John, and Marian Bishop Mumford. He summarizes:

Neither position [Jorgensen's or Cracroft's] came off well in the discussion, although certainly Jorgensen's more generous remarks fared best. Several of us had read and thought well of Scott Card's *A Storyteller in Zion* and his views of fiction seemed to coincide with most of ours.

Another lively discussion analyzed the odd Mormon preference for specious fact (or "based on fact" narrative) over true fictions, as if there were something unholy about telling true stories rather than, as is the case, falsifying under the "real life" banners of journalism, history, biography, or autobiography.

Our conclusion was that it is impossible to write authentically without basing one's writing on and expressing definite moral values. It is within that set of values that a writer makes judgments that mark every character and event in his or her fiction; each writer expresses his or her world-view. If a writer is Mormon, that Mormonism will be expressed, if only unconsciously.

The afternoon session featured a number of writers reading from their works: Ann Edwards Cannon, Linda Hoffman Kimball, Leno and Kelly Mendiola, Steven Graves, Deborah Butler, Jim Coleman, and Sue Paxman reading the poems of her father, Clinton F. Larson. The meeting ended with an evening session by Rosalee Sorrells, a folksinger and storyteller from Idaho, who related many delightful anecdotes from her own and her mother's lives in Idaho and about the Mormons and Mormon music she has known.

The AML also sponsored a lively and provocative panel at the Salt Lake City Sunstone Symposium in August 1994: "Eros in LDS Life and Literature," featuring Bruce W. Jorgensen as both moderator and participant with Margaret Blair Young and Karin Anderson England. This panel, along with additional papers and presentations from 1993-94, will appear in future issues of the *Annual*.

No slight manifestation of the healthy interest in the state of Mormon literature has been the cheerful response of authors during the editing process for these papers. My hearty thanks go to these authors for their cheerful and painstaking response on frequently short notice. The association's president-elect Robert M. Hogge and secretary-treasurer John Bennion have been indispensable in the printing and distribution of this volume.

—Lavina Fielding Anderson



## 1993 Presidential Address

### AND NOW FOR A LITTLE MORMON HUMOR

Ann Edwards Cannon\*

I was standing in the Acadia National Park gift shop on the coast of Maine in the summer of 1992 when I overheard two college-aged store clerks discussing Mormonism. Actually, they weren't discussing. She was doing virtually all the listening, and he was doing virtually all the talking, trying his level male best to impress her with the breadth and depth of his knowledge. She looked politely uninterested as only women who have been out on one too many dates to boring guys can look. I, on the other hand, was fascinated, especially when it became clear to me that this eager young man had found himself a warehouse clearance sale on anti-Mormon literature—real vintage nineteenth-century stuff.

With a growing sense of perverse delight, I eavesdropped on their one-way conversation, which wasn't hard to do since he, quite frankly, was pontificating in a voice loud enough to violate noise ordinances throughout the state of Maine. He told her about blood atonement and blood sacrifice. He warned her that Gentiles sometimes had their throats slit in our streets. And, of course, he repeatedly mentioned the P-word, polygamy. Indeed, I half expected him to tell her that fair maidens, kidnapped and dragged back to Zion in gunny sacks by lustful missionaries, regularly hurled themselves from the spires of the temple into the murky waters of the Great Salt Lake in an attempt to escape the horrors of plural marriage.

"And do you want to hear something else weird about the Mormons?" he asked, his eyes gleaming.

The girl gave him the go-ahead with a non-committal smile.

"They don't eat or drink anything hot," he told her. "It says right here in their Book of Mormon that they can't drink tea or coffee or hot chocolate. Hey, they can't even drink soup!"

I could contain myself no longer. I walked up to the pair of them and said, "Excuse me. I am a Mormon from Utah, and I just want to let you know that the part about the soup isn't true."

I think it is a fair assessment of the situation to say that

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\*Ann Edwards Cannon is a writer living in Tuxedo Park, New York. Her *Cal Cameron by Day, Spider-Man by Night* (New York: Dell/Laurel-Leaf Books, 1988), won the fifth annual Delacorte Press Prize for an outstanding first young adult novel. This presidential address was delivered at the Association for Mormon Letters annual meeting, at Westminster College, Salt Lake City, January 23, 1993 and published in *Sunstone* 16.7 (December 1993): 17-21.

I made them gape; and given what they both knew about the way Mormons deal with mouthy Gentiles, they were in no hurry to trifle with me.

It was a *moment*, don't you know.

My amusement persisted for a time after I joined my husband, Ken, who had been waiting patiently for me in the parking lot out front. But as my giddy mood wore off, I was mildly conscious of the sense of displacement one feels when realizing that in a particular instance, at least, he or she is clearly on the outside.

Oddly enough, I experienced the exact same sensation in a Mormon setting not long afterwards. Ken, who was then the second counselor in the ward bishopric, came home and told me that a visiting high councilor had given the bishopric a pop quiz about Mormon funerals and how to conduct one appropriately. Now I think you will agree with me when I say that the thought of a bunch of grown guys in suits sweating over an unannounced quiz like they were all in junior high English class again is, in and of itself, not an unfunny thing. What did disturb me, however, was question number 23, which went as follows: "As a general rule, which of the following topics is appropriate for speakers at funeral services? A. Resurrection, B. Mediation of Christ, C. Certainty of life after death, D. Humorous anecdotes or vignettes from deceased's life, E. All of the above."

To my profound shock, the correct answer was not "E. All of the above." Apparently, these days, only answers A, B, and C are deemed appropriate subjects of discourse for funerals. The telling of humorous anecdotes or vignettes from the deceased's life, on the other hand, is to be gently discouraged.

"But Mormon funerals are supposed to be funny," I wailed. "Remember how my Uncle Lew got up at my grandfather's funeral and told the story about the time Uncle Don and Grandpa had to chase all those escaped chickens throughout the entire town of Ferron?"

My grandfather was a truck farmer who used to drive through the southern part of the state, peddling fruit from door to door. Cash was preferred, but he would take payment in kind, too, which explains how he ended up with a truckload of chickens. When he and my uncle stopped in Ferron, Utah, for lunch, the chickens, as they say, flew the coop. Upon discovering this state of affairs, my grandfather and uncle raced through the streets and alleys, the private yards and public grounds, the houses, school, church, and fire station of Ferron, bagging every single chicken they could find. Later as they drove out of town, my grandfather turned to my uncle and said, "Donny, I do believe we are leaving this place with more chickens than we arrived with."

Naturally family members at the funeral had heard the story dozens of times, but it still made us laugh, and on this occasion it gave us comfort, too. Indeed the shared vision of that sweet-souled man, Philo Edwards, racing through the streets of Ferron, swearing and threatening bodily harm to a flock of fleeing hens, made him seem alive and warmly present to those of us in the chapel, mourning his death. In a very real way that afternoon, our laughter healed us. That's why Ken's news about funerals stunned me



to such an unpleasant degree. In fact, the thought that the public observance of my death just might be turned into another boring sacrament meeting, heavy on doctrine and light on humor, alarmed me to such an extent that I promptly wrote down my wishes for my own funeral. They are as follows:

I do hereby declare my desire for the good old-fashioned Mormon funeral of my Utah County youth.

First, let there be food—lots of it—so that family and friends who drive long distances can be assured of a fine, fortifying meal in the cultural hall after my funeral is over. Let the good sisters of our Relief Society presidency assign everyone in the ward to bring a dish—tater tot casseroles and green bean casseroles and chicken-lickin' casseroles and every other casserole ever invented that has Campbell's Soup as a primary ingredient.

And let there be Jell-O, too. Jell-O with little marshmallows and Jell-O salad with fruit cocktail and most especially that monument to gelatin engineering which takes no less than twenty-four hours to make, Rainbow Jell-O Salad!

Let there also be musical numbers, the neighbor lady with the imperfect but sincere soprano voice singing my favorite hymn; the Primary children, sweet and silly, singing my favorite Primary song.

And finally let there be anecdotes—oh, yes, let there be anecdotes—the funnier the better, after which please arrange for the Salt Lake Scots to follow the caisson bearing my casket to the cemetery. (Author's note: I realize that, strictly speaking, bagpipes are not a part of traditional Mormon funerals. They do, however, appeal to my sense of the dramatic.) Remember to bury me deep, then place a tombstone at my head which reads, "Here lies Ann Edwards Cannon. She did as she damn well pleased."

Perhaps it's that I grew up in a Latter-day Saint family full of storytellers, but I've always thought that Mormons have a way with anecdotes, some of them obviously growing out of an individual's personal experience, others culled from the body of jokes and stories that Mormons tell each other, which, in fact, as Bert Wilson pointed out in his article, "The Seriousness of Mormon Humor," Mormons "have probably always told each other about each other."

Indeed, one of the few earthly possessions my aunts found in the drawer of my extremely faithful grandmother when she died—I can't seem to get away from the death thing—was a mimeographed collection of Mormon bloopers. These were embarrassing things that people supposedly have done or said or written while at church, such as a bishop standing before his congregation and saying "gold-rimmed testicles" when what he really meant was "gold-rimmed

spectacles." You know the sort of thing I mean. Frankly, I like to think of my little blue-haired grandmother sitting on the back row during sacrament meeting, passing out copies of this silly and mildly naughty collection to all her little blue-haired friends.

As both Wilson and Richard Cracroft have pointed out in their essays on Mormon humor, Mormons, like most groups, have a tradition of oral humor which serves a variety of purposes ranging from self-congratulations to self-deflation. In a Mormon context, humor helps defuse sensitive subjects such as sex, as well as latent resentment toward the Church's authoritarian and sometimes autocratic power structure. Perhaps most important, it can act as a safety valve, enabling believing Mormons, in the words of Cracroft, to "lessen the tension and the incongruity between ourselves and the high and demanding standards of our faith and the Church which houses our faith" ("Humor," 14).

What Mormons don't have to quite the same extent is a tradition of written humor, and much of the written humor we do have is purely accidental. I agree with Cracroft's assessment that, with a few notable exceptions, "one must search far into the first half of the twentieth century before turning up any intentionally sustained published humor" ("Freshet," 31).

Actually, unintentional humor is better than no humor at all. When I was in high school, I used to think Helen Andelin's *Fascinating Womanhood* was a scream, especially when it advised female readers to pout, stamp their feet like vexed little girls, and beat their "puny fists" against their spouses' chest in an effort to make them feel more manly.

Later, when I was in graduate school, I occasionally turned to the fiction of the old *Juvenile Instructor* for entertainment, although a part of me was genuinely moved by its earnest attempt to assist young people interested in self-improvement. The *Juvenile Instructor*, which billed itself as "an illustrated semi-monthly magazine designed expressly for the education and elevation of the youth," routinely published stories of high adventure, intrigue, melodrama, and romance. They were, for the most part, much livelier than anything I ever remember reading in the *New Era* while I was growing up. I remember one western story in particular called "Flaxie," which featured cowboy characters with names like Black Sam and Bronco Dick. It was, as you can imagine, an extremely educational and elevating story.

Later still, after I quit teaching and stayed home to raise children, I came to savor the unintentional humor of ward cookbooks. I especially enjoyed the exotic names of many dishes including "Mexicano Chicken Kiev," "Fondue Mexicana," "Speedy Chop Suey," "Turkey Tetrazzini," "Chinese Hamburger Casserole," and "Waikiki Meatballs." But of course! What else would one expect from a worldwide church? I deeply regret that Roger S. Salazar and Michael G. Wightman got around to doing a parody of Mormon cookbooks before I did. I am, of course, referring to *No Man Knows My Pastries* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992).

Unintentional humor is fine, but so is intentional humor—especially when it works. Because I'm beginning to feel as British

essayist Nancy Mitford did when she said she wanted to read a book only if it made her laugh, I just wish there were more intentional Mormon humor. Indeed, as I was preparing this address, I asked a number of people inside and outside of the Church to name Mormon humorists. With very few exceptions, they responded with the same short list of individuals. Furthermore, they invariably mentioned Mormon cartoonists before Mormon writers, which is entirely understandable, given the immense talent and widespread exposure these individuals enjoy.

When Calvin Grondahl arrived on the scene in the seventies, he was a breath of fresh air, was he not, poking gentle and often not-so-gentle fun at Mormon ways. Who can forget the cartoon featuring a proud papa holding up the world's ugliest baby for the traditional murmurs of congregational approval after its blessing?

Like Grondahl, Pat Bagley also lampoons Mormon culture in his cartoons. Recently, Bagley put his talent for parody to use in two children's books, *I Spy a Nephite* and *A Nephite in the Works* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991 and 1992 respectively). Frankly, I find it quite heartening that Bagley's publisher was none other than Deseret Book. I'm certain that ten years ago Deseret Book would not have taken on a project that features a goofy-looking Nephite named Norman wandering Waldo-style through such familiar Mormon scenarios as the preexistence, the exodus west, and, yes, a ward wedding complete with an Elvis impersonator on the cultural hall stage. I applaud Deseret Book for recognizing that many Mormons can laugh at themselves.

When people finally got around to Mormon writers who have written funny, they mentioned names we're all familiar with: Sam Taylor, the granddaddy humorist of them all, Rodello Hunter, Ardyth Kennelly, Elouise Bell, Jerry Johnston, Clifton Jolley, Carol Lynn Pearson, Levi Peterson, James Arrington, Neal Chandler, Don Marshall, Edward Geary, Paul Toscano (although one person did say that "funny" is not a word she usually thinks of in relation to Paul Toscano), Orson Scott Card, Joni Hilton, Kathryn Kidd, and, finally, my own favorite, Louise Plummer.

In her collection of mostly humorous essays, *Thoughts of a Grasshopper* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), Plummer displays a nice range of comic talent. Some of the pieces are gently funny in the tradition of Ed Geary's *Good-bye to Poplar Haven* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1982). Others, such as her written audition for a stake-sponsored rendition of the *Book of Mormon Oratorio*, are simply hysterical. And still others have that quality I personally find most interesting in comedy—edge.

Humor also informs her award-winning novels for young adult readers, *The Romantic Obsessions* and *Humiliations of Annie Sehlmeier* and *My Name is Susan Smith (The 5 Is Silent)*, which brings to mind another fine Mormon writer I haven't mentioned, Dean Hughes.

Hughes writes books for children and is fond of saying, like Rodney Dangerfield, that he gets no respect because of it. My response to Dean is that plenty of readers from young people to teachers and librarians all over the country admire his work for

many reasons, not the least of which is that it is often very funny.

Now, the good news is that this list from Taylor to Plummer and Hughes includes talented individuals who have made a genuine contribution to the body of Mormon letters. The bad news is that except for the addition of a few more names, it's practically identical to the list of people mentioned by Bert Wilson and Richard Cracroft in their articles on Mormon humor published by *Sunstone* clear back in 1985—1985, for mercy's sake! That's ten years ago!

There has been some—although probably not very much—speculation as to why Mormons don't do more written humor. Much of it has to do with the inherent seriousness of the Mormon agenda, which, among other things, includes that minor matter of building God's kingdom here on earth. Verbal humor is safer in this kind of a mission-charged setting: folks laugh, tension evaporates, everybody goes on their way. Once spoken, words turn into so much wind. Recorded, however, words endure. Recorded on stone, they can even become commandments.

I think, however, there is another factor that is at least partially responsible for the short list of Mormon humorists. I'm reminded of the year my husband, Ken, and I lived in Finland. A question often put to me by the people we met was, "What do Americans think of us Finns?" I couldn't bring myself to speak the naked truth which, of course, is that we don't think of Finns at all. So instead I told them that whenever the subject of Finns comes up in our conversations back home, we always, always say they are the toughest folks God ever made. This answer managed to please a lot of people because inner fortitude, or *sisu*, as they call it, rates a solid ten on the Finnish Scale of Desirable Personality Traits. After several encounters with eager and earnest Finns, I remarked to my husband that I had never met a people who were so concerned with how others perceive them—except, of course, the Mormons.

What Mormons crave, it seems to me, is respectability and credibility with those outside the faith. And who can blame them? Standing there in that isolated gift shop in Maine, I had the merest taste of what must have been a steady diet for my pioneer great-grandparents. In their fascinating book *The Mormon Graphic Image, 1835-1914: Cartoons, Caricatures, and Illustrations*, Gary L. Bunker and Davis Bitton vividly demonstrate the derision with which Mormons were viewed during the previous century. A representative cartoon entitled "The Elders' Happy Home," for example, shows a large bed in which the old and ugly wives are beating up on the young and pretty wives (89). And, of course, who can forget Mark Twain's pithy observation that, after seeing for himself the extremely homely sisters of Zion, he changed his mind about polygamy:

The man that marries one of them has done an act of Christian charity which entitles him to the kindly applause of mankind, not their harsh censure—and the man

that marries sixty of them has done a deed of open-handed generosity so sublime that the nations should stand uncovered in his presence and worship in silence. (77).

Sometimes I feel that the major thrust of the twentieth-century Church has been to distance itself as far as possible from its truly radical roots in order to make itself fit for the polite society that condemned it one hundred years ago.

In short, Mormons wish to be taken seriously.

Plenty of Mormon writers, whether they're the kind that write for the faithful or the kind that don't, want the same thing. Of course, they may want to be taken seriously by different groups. Some, perhaps, may wish to be taken seriously by the General Authorities. Others may wish to be taken seriously by the mainstream membership of the Church. Others may crave the approval of the Sunstone set, while still others may wish to be acknowledged by the literary establishment outside the Church. And the best way to be taken seriously, is—you guessed it—to write seriously.

In his essay entitled "Some Remarks on Humor," E. B. White has this to say:

The world likes its humor, but it treats it patronizingly. It decorates its serious artists with laurel, and its wags with Brussels spouts. It feels that if a thing is funny it can be presumed to be something less than great, because if it were truly great it would be wholly seriously. Writers know this, and those who take their literary selves with great seriousness are at considerable pains never to associate their name with anything funny or flippant or nonsensical or "light." They suspect it would hurt their reputation, and they are right. (244)

Now, I realize that this address sounds suspiciously like a call to action, a battle cry for Mormon writers to write funny. And on a purely selfish level, I would like to see that happen. I can't begin to describe the enormous pleasure I have taken over the years in our writers who possess a light touch. And yet, as American humorist Frank Colby warned,

The only really fatal thing is the shamming of humor when you have it not. There are people whom nature meant to be solemn from their cradle to their grave. They are under bonds to remain so. In so far as they are true to themselves, they are safe company for anyone, but outside their proper field they are terrible. Solemnity is relatively a blessing, and the man who was born with it should never be encouraged to wrench himself away. (Qtd. in White 246)

So perhaps I will conclude this way: writers do come with their own set of fairy gifts, and they should be allowed to do with them what comes naturally. In short, they should be encouraged to

fulfill the measure of their own creation. In the final analysis, this is what I believe absolutely. As Shakespeare said, "At Christmas I no more desire a rose / Than wish a snow in May's new-fangled mirth" (*Love's Labour's Lost*, I.1.105-06). I no more desire that Judith Freeman write like a Sam Taylor or that a Terry Tempest Williams write like an Elouise Bell.

I'm just glad we have them all.

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## 1994 Presidential Address

### THE POWER OF THE PREPOSITION

*Linda Brummett\**

In November 1991 I was nominated to become president-elect of this august association. I fully realized that in two years and two months I would need to give this PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS. (For two years and two months, when I have thought of today, the words "THE PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS" have invariably appeared in my mind in very large capital letters.) But my obvious and apparent inadequacies for this assignment prompted one AML board member on that evening two years and two months ago, by way of persuading me to accept the nomination, to offer his help writing THE PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS. You all know very well that you can say "yes" to anything that is two years and two months away. So I high-mindedly spurned his offer, pledged my undying loyalty to AML, said, "Anything. I'll do anything you need," and accepted the nomination. Then, on that day two years ago when Steven Sondrup called for any additional nominations from the group gathered where you are now, everyone—including many of you—let me down. I was elected and now I stand here facing the anything I agreed to two years and two months ago.

Some of you may politely object to my assertion that I am obviously inadequate to this task. I assure you, however, I certainly am. To prove this to myself, I read seven previous presidential addresses as part of my preparation to write this presidential address. (See the danger in publishing this association's proceedings! I had access to the brilliance of seven predecessors.) I was impressed; in fact, I was overwhelmed . . . or rather, immobilized. I am simply not capable of using, beyond this citation, words such as "perspicacious" and "ethos." So, I considered hiring a paid speech writer; it works for politicians. But Louise Plummer was too busy. Or . . . I thought perhaps a video would be a nice alternative to the expected annual scholarly evaluation and dissection of the state of Mormon letters. Maybe *It's a Mad Mad Mad Mad Mad Mad World*. As ironically appropriate as that title may be, the movie itself is even longer than the

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*\*Linda Brummett is manager of the General Book Department of the BYU Bookstore, a ward Primary president, an officer in the American Booksellers Association, and a doting aunt of seventeen. She delivered this presidential address at the Association for Mormon Letters annual meeting, 22 January 1994, Westminster College, Salt Lake City.*

presidential addresses of Bruce Jorgensen and Richard Cracroft combined, so I had to abandon that option. Well, there is no answer except to actually give a PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS.

Just a brief explanation about this complete confidence in my inadequacies. I did not choose an academic career. I am a merchant. For nineteen years I have been the manager of the General Book Department of the BYU Bookstore. I started working in the BYU BOOKSTORE when I was a freshman and stayed. I have never "presented a paper"; I have never been published. By the way, I don't expect today's talk to alter that particular claim in any way at all. My lack of an academic specialty or of any particular gift as a writer has led me to accept as my goal in this assignment to be mildly entertaining and brief. If nothing else you can all leave today thinking, "I, too, can be president of AML. I could do better than that." My writing, before this talk, consisted of a roadshow, two Primary Christmas plays, three Primary sacrament programs, occasional articles for condo, ward, or various other association newsletters, and the occasional piece of correspondence, usually some type of nagging memo to my employees. I don't even keep a journal. Looking over the list of my predecessors, it seems I am the only nonwriting, unpublished, or nonacademic president of the Association for Mormon Letters. Writing this talk has made those eighteen-hour work days during Education Week look like a vacation!

Eighteen months ago I was relieved to realize that I already had a topic for this talk . . . and a title. That title was "The Power of the Preposition." I chose this title when I kept encountering people who referred to this organization as the Association of Mormon Letters instead of the Association for Mormon Letters. In fact the notice of today's symposium in the *Deseret News* used the "of" preposition. We all know that the preposition "of" functions to indicate a component, such as "a book of poems" or to indicate a point of reference, such as "north of Provo" or to indicate a characteristic, such as "a woman of courage." Well, you get the idea. This prepositional confusion has led some people to think we are an organization of Mormon letter writers—true story, ask Steven Sondrup—or an organization of Mormon writers, true in part but not in the whole. On the other hand, "for" is a preposition that indicates suitability, such as "it truly is not best for me to give this talk" or indicating composition, such as "chicken for lunch," or to indicate purpose, such as "an association for nurturing the creation and study of Mormon writing." Think of the Latin predecessor to the word "for," which is "pro"—on the affirmative side, to favor. To me this is a significant difference and I am delighted to be pro Mormon letters, even if I am not of the body of writers themselves. Short talk, eh? Unfortunately I quickly realized that what I had here was a pet peeve, not a talk.

I suppose it is time to get to the PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS. I've already succeeded in exploiting a public forum with my AML pet peeve and I've more than fully explained my inadequacies.

In the "President's Message" I wrote for our newsletter, I described myself as having lifted "audience" to a professional



level. I don't write, but I do read. So, for those of you who do write and publish, I am your audience—and in true bookaholic fashion, I then find others, hereafter known as customers, to join me in reading your poems, short stories, essays, plays, novels, and biographies. In a very real, sixty-hour-a-week kind of way, I am truly a professional in the audience for Mormon letters. I think, looking over this group, that there are many more members of this ever-growing audience in attendance today. That's probably why we're here.

It will be as a member of this readership that I will deliver today's PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS—not as a scholar, but as a fan.

Since this is an AML luncheon, rather than a meeting of the retail merchants' association or a Sunday School class, I am working from a basic assumption. I assume that we each have some interest in or commitment to the notion of exploring human experiences and feelings through writing. This exploration may take various forms: poetry, fiction, essay, biography, drama, sermon. Each writer in this world of Mormon letters brings new vision to our shared context of Mormon beliefs and heritage. Each reader finds new insight in this adventure called life through the eyes of these writers. I am here today to try to say some encouraging words to writers and readers alike.

I do believe that the present and future of Mormon writing are encouraging. Quantity alone, admittedly not the best gauge for everything, is in this case an indicator of some positive things. The marketplace of readers grows every day. I can't be absolutely certain that more is being written (though we can guess that this surely must be so); but I can assure you that, in the arena of Mormon letters, much, much more is being published and sold now than ever before. It is common these days to find neighborhood reading groups anxious for the next Scott Card novel or the next Emma Lou Thayne poem. It is a daily event for me to hear one student telling another why Gerald Lund's books are great reading and perfect gifts for both Mom and Dad. The recent production of Tom Roger's play *Heubener* was sold out, extended, and sold out again. We sell more copies of *Refuge* and *A Midwife's Tale* than *Jurassic Park*. Is this exciting to anyone else?

I live by the maxim: the more people read, the more people read. I believe this encompasses both notions that individuals read more as they find interesting things to read, and individuals share their enthusiasm with others and consequently get more people to read. A study commissioned by the American Booksellers Association several years ago showed that the single most successful way for a reader to select a book is by the recommendation of someone else who has read it. Word of mouth beats the \$100,000 advertising allowances. In fact, I contend that most of us would believe the recommendation of a total stranger sitting next to us on an airplane more than an ad in a newspaper. We really seem to believe the recommendations of our neighbors, friends, colleagues and friendly local booksellers. As we (that "we" being members of this association: writers, publishers, readers) find ways to share the good news about the wealth of writing available, we will be

rewarded by an increasing wealth. See! The more people read, the more people read. We each have a vested interest in sharing the message. As writers, our readership increases; as readers, our reading material increases.

Pollyanna Brummett here. Well, of course, it isn't completely rosy. Wonderful, worthy, significant books still go out of print because the sales are not sufficient for the publisher to justify the warehouse space or to afford the cost of reprinting. Silly, unimportant books, void of clear thought, still find an audience. It has always been thus, and surely it will thus continue in all areas of writing and publishing. Evidence of that is found on both remainder tables and on bestseller lists. We, the readers, choose. Our reviews are at the cash registers and at the library circulation counters. The marketplace of readers, growing as it is, will find what it wants. I'm confident that we share the hope that more readers will turn from the silly and unimportant to the significant and sublime. But I assure you that I will not even begin to try to define what is the significant and what is the sublime; I'll leave that to the next round between Bruce Jorgensen and Richard Cracroft. Finding the wonderful is frequently a result of increased reading. So maybe I need to add a corollary to my maxim: the more people read, the better people read.

In fact, while I want to celebrate the wealth of novels, biographies, poetry, essays, short stories, and plays we currently enjoy, I also want to voice the reminder that the significant and sublime come only after the art has been well nurtured and developed. In his preface to his edition of essays on Arts and Inspiration, Steven Soudrup gave us this statement on creativity:

Art in the best and broadest sense of the word necessarily involves inspiration, vision, or creativity and a mastery of medium, form and style. The untrained hand cannot make the violin sing no matter how moved it may feel, and the untrained mind cannot unite thought with image or concept with metaphor to create the moving, essentially poetic statement." (1)

Isn't it a delightful development that there are now a number of publishers regularly providing opportunities for writers to develop and then to share their art? Publishers who shunned fiction fifteen years ago now have active fiction programs. William Mulder once referred to the designation "A.D." as "after Dialogue," certainly a statement that is both clever and accurate when we view the number of periodicals now actively publishing works that must be considered by AML for recognition.

I've mentioned previously that I primarily wanted this talk to be a celebration of Mormon letters by a fan, a member of the audience. Let me explain my early relationship with the works of Mormon writers. When I was a pre-reader, my father used to fill my daily minimum reading requirement with regular bedtime stories and poems. He often used an anthology from the Primary Association entitled *A Story to Tell*. One of my favorite stories was "Tick and

Tock." I asked for it frequently; and just this last Christmas, one of my sisters and I reminisced about this story. Nostalgia prompted me to look up this story, and I discovered that it had been written by Arta Ballif! I didn't come to Utah until I was eighteen; so, of course, as a child I had never heard of Arta Ballif.

As I was growing up, I didn't live near many Mormons, much less near any stores selling books by or about Mormons. When I was sixteen, however, a concerned aunt sent me a copy of Nephi Anderson's *Added Upon*. I was not showing the proper interest in marriage, and there was hope in my aunt's heart that this short novel would change my perspective. It didn't. And I must admit that reading this book produced a long, long stretch of negative responses to the phrase "Mormon fiction." Mormon biographies and diaries? Yes. Poetry? Well, some of it, but there again I so frequently encountered that same didactic focus I had found so very annoying in *Added Upon*. Fortunately during my college years, I found books by Carol Lynn Pearson, Don Marshall, Maurine Whipple, and Sam Taylor. I went to a play about Alma the Younger by some student named Scott Card. I was ready to try again. When I was nineteen, I had a copy of this Carol Lynn Pearson poem hanging over my bed:

#### Guilt

I have no vulture sins, God  
That overhang my sky,  
To climb, grey-feathering the air,  
And swoop carnivorously.  
It's just the tiny sins, God  
That from memory appear  
Like tedious, buzzing flies to dart  
Like static through my prayer. (2)

Remember Minna, baking cookies for children who no longer have time to eat them and Floydene, who found and lost her missionary in the mail? Thank you, Don Marshall, for *The Rummage Sale: Collections and Recollections* (Provo, Utah: Heirloom Publications, 1972). Well, now I was prepared to discover *Heaven Knows Why* by Samuel Taylor (New York: A. A. Wyn, 1948). The problem with picking out some works to celebrate is that time won't allow a complete listing of much-loved favorites. At the risk of hurting the feelings of very dear friends, however, I am going to continue this short recognition and celebration of writing that helped me win my professional book-audience status.

I was twenty-three before I bought my first car, so I was twenty-three before I traveled south of the Villa Theatre in Springville for the first time. Reading Ed Geary's *Good-bye to Poplarhaven* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1982) made me feel like an adopted daughter of this great high plateau country of Utah. I now knew it as a child knows its home.

I am so grateful that twenty years ago Richard Cracroft and Neal Lambert produced their splendid anthology *A Believing People* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press 1974) and saved many important parts of our

literary heritage for us. Fifteen years ago Eileen Gibbons Kump gracefully and gently showed us the wonder of the simple tasks and joys of life in her collection of short stories titled *Bread and Milk and Other Stories* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1979). Eighteen years ago a group of women in New England produced a collection of essays titled *Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah* (Ed. Claudia L. Bushman [Cambridge, MA: Emeline Press, 1976]) that changed the way I look at Mormon history.

Thank heavens for the anthologizers who rescue works gone out of print and restore them to our awareness and introduce them to all of those new readers. What a treasure we have in *Bright Angels and Familiars*, edited by Eugene England (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994). Just look at the table of contents and rejoice at this collection of short stories.

Personally, my life is often rejuvenated by the quick administration of copious doses of Elouise Bell, Louise Plummer, Emma Lou Thayne, and Chieko Okazaki.

I want to close this tribute to the writers of all kinds of those creations called Mormon letters, that truly have been letters from these authors to me, with this poem by Susan Howe from *Harvest: Contemporary Poems* titled "To my Great-Great Grandmother, Written on a Flight to Salt Lake City."

Caught here in an arc  
Between the sea coast where your ocean  
Voyage left you, and the mountains  
Where you walked to make your home,  
I see, at last, grandmother  
Of my grandmother, you whom I have never known.  
It is the light. Flying westward  
In a craft of air holds darkness off.  
It has been sunset for a long time.  
Hours stretch in a thin curve, arcing  
Back before flight, before the sun  
Caught vapor trails across the sky.

You were the one who walked this route  
Seven miles below, stone-cut  
Feet seeking sand or turf to ease  
The stiffness—and your arms, thin,  
Spare from pulling all your earthly  
Goods behind. You were almost lost  
Within those miles where the earth curves  
Away from me, but a stream of light  
Burned—and when I looked away, there  
You were. Perhaps the legacy  
You offered me finds symbol in the place  
To which I journey as deliberately  
As you walked. Or because at the end  
Of every seven-, ten-, or fifteen-mile day,  
You stood, just at sunset, squinting at the golden  
Dust of those who walked ahead, sure that your journey  
Would endure. You saw then the burning

Through which I see you. Sunlight where we both dwell. (3)

I had vowed to myself that this would be a talk with nothing as scholarly as footnotes. In fact, my second working title was "Not a Footnote"; well, since I've already blown that objective by merely quoting writers, I will close with another footnoted quote. I hope that William Mulder still believes what he wrote about the future of Mormon letters in 1954—forty years ago. I think that we have seen his words come true in many ways, but that we all hope the vision continues to be fulfilled:

Mormon literature will move toward the promise of its highly articulate beginnings, for Mormon readers will demand of Mormon writers authentic voices, whether in fiction, in history, in biography, or in missionary tract—the authority of good writing, of truths made memorable. (4)

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## Visiting Scholar Lecture

### CLIO MEETS ELIJAH AT THE FAMILY HISTORY CENTER

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich\*

I am a professional historian and also volunteer two or three times a month as a librarian in the Family History Center in our stake. When I was asked to speak at this AML gathering in Salt Lake City, I decided to try bringing my two lives together by imagining a meeting of Elijah and Clio.

Every Latter-day Saint knows Elijah, the prophet who turned "the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers" by restoring the keys of genealogy and temple work. But who is the mysterious Clio?

When my husband heard the title of my lecture, he said, "Oh, yes, Clio. Isn't she mentioned in Paul's epistle to the Romans?" I panicked and ran to my concordance. To my great relief, I did not find a New Testament Clio. It was very important to my comparison that Clio remain a pagan.

In Greek mythology, Clio is one of the nine muses who sprang from a union of Zeus and Mnemosyne, or Memory. Although we usually speak of the "muses" collectively, each has a name and a mission. Clio is the muse of history.<sup>1</sup>

Historians aren't the sort of people who usually admit to having muses. Poets have muses. Historians have only footnotes. Yet in language and in our institutional life, we acknowledge Clio playfully and with some affection. She is to our clan what the Goddess of Liberty is to the U.S. Congress—an abstract

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\*Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, winner of the 1991 Pulitzer Prize for history for *A Midwife's Tale: the Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Knopf, 1991), a book which had previously won the Bancroft Prize and the Joan Kelly and John H. Dunning Prizes, delivered an illustrated version of this essay as first annual AML Visiting Scholar, Joseph Smith Memorial Building, Salt Lake City, Utah, January 14, 1994. In late 1994, Ulrich, a professor of history at the University of New Hampshire, accepted an appointment beginning in the fall of 1995 to a tenured full professorship at Harvard University, a joint appointment in history and women's studies, the first woman ever to hold a tenured position in American history at Harvard.

<sup>1</sup>The others are Calliope (epic poetry), Erato (love poetry), Euterpe (lyric poetry), Melpomene (tragedy), Thalia (comedy), Urania (astronomy), Terpsichore (dance), and Polyhymnia (sacred song).

representation who has no immediate influence on our daily work. Clio is whatever we wish to make her. We name awards after her and sometimes invoke her name in the titles of books. When I was in graduate school in the 1970s, historians were heatedly debating the virtues of something they called Cliometrics—a marriage of history and statistics. Clio has survived many marriages since Hesiod first invoked her name. I suppose she can survive a meeting with Elijah.

I chose the title to my talk impulsively, thinking it would give me an opportunity to explore the relationship between my secular work as a historian and my Church calling at the Family History center. I expected to discuss the differences between history (Clio's territory) and genealogy (Elijah's realm). Yet the more I thought about the actual work that goes on in a Family History Center, the less satisfied I was with that comparison. I wanted to use the two figures more freely to symbolize contrasting approaches to the past. Yes, history and genealogy meet every day at Family History Centers across the United States, but I am not at all certain Clio is responsible for all the history and Elijah for all the genealogy.

Clio was a Greek, Elijah a Hebrew. Hence, the two figures can be seen to represent the ongoing and never totally resolved tension in western culture between the Greek commitment with reason and the Hebrew tradition of faith—a tension resolved, I think, in the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith and in the concept of the Kirtland Temple as a house of both "learning" and "faith" (D&C 88:119). To me, it is one of the great paradoxes of Mormon history that a man capable of translating the Book of Mormon by the gift and power of the Holy Ghost would take the trouble to study Hebrew so he could better understand the Bible. That's a little like what happens every day at our Family History Centers. Motivated by the spirit of Elijah, we sit in front of microfilm readers and do the works of Clio.

My contrast between Clio and Elijah is not, then, a contrast between good and evil, between the ways of the world and the ways of the Lord. It is a contrast between two very different ways of approaching the past, both of which have something to teach us, and both of which are perfectly evident in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building.

When I walked into the Joseph Smith Memorial Building, the remodeled and rededicated former Hotel Utah for the first time, I did a double take. The marble figure of Joseph Smith in his 1840s frock coat seemed entirely out of place in the late-Victorian lushness of the 1911 building. Clio was leaning over my shoulder at that moment. Clio doesn't like anachronisms. She wants us to know the distance—materially, culturally, intellectually, and perhaps even spiritually—between 1842 and 1900.

Those things don't matter much to Elijah. He symbolizes the unity—not the distance—between present and past. As Doctrine and Covenants 128:18 tells us: "For it is necessary in the ushering in of the dispensation of the fulness of time, which dispensation is now beginning to usher in, that a whole and complete and perfect union, and welding together of dispensations, and keys, and powers,

and glories should take place, and be revealed from the days of Adam even to the present time." The spirit of Elijah not only melts away the distance between past and present, it pierces the veil between heaven and earth. Clio allows us to encounter the dead only through the things they leave behind. She is behind an old aphorism in my profession: no source, no history. Nothing is more sacred to Clio than sources. She teaches us that we can know only as much about the past as surviving letters, diaries, censuses, and artifacts can teach us.

At a winter dinner party at our house, the conversation turned to genealogy and temple work. One of our guests told us about taking her mother to northern New Hampshire to find the birthplace of an elusive great-grandfather. "Mother has worked for years trying to find his records," our friend explained. "Of course, she's still not sure this is where he was born; but when she saw the town, she just felt it was the right place." That's what's known in Latter-day Saint culture as the confirming evidence of the Spirit. Historians can't get away with that sort of evidence. But I'm not sure my friend's mother can either. She will have to prove her great-grandfather's existence through finite and earthly sources—Clio's sources—before she can do his temple work. She would be delighted with the new computer cluster in the Joseph Smith Memorial.

The Latter-day Saint interest in records is truly puzzling to outsiders. Last year at a historical meeting someone shared with me a conversation he overheard while he was doing research at a small archive in Pennsylvania. Two members of the staff there were discussing the impending visit of a team of technicians from the Family History Center in Salt Lake City.

"They are coming to film our records," the first man explained.

"Oh, we can't let them do that," said the other. "Don't you know what they do with those records? They'll turn all our ancestors into Mormons!"

The first man responded drily, "If you really think they can do that, you'd better join their church."

For most Latter-day Saints, the two enterprises—genealogy and temple work—seem perfectly compatible. We never stop to think about the paradox inherent in our system. To renew our own covenants with God we must connect ourselves to other people, long dead. We achieve that connection not only through vicarious temple work but by library work, saving ourselves and saving our dead by concentrating on the most mundane and tedious of tasks—researching names and dates. The emphasis on records is right there in Doctrine and Covenants 12. In verses 2-4, the Prophet instructed the Nauvoo Saints to establish recorders in each ward. "You may think this order of things to be very particular," he continued in verse 5, "but let me tell you that it is only to answer the will of God, by conforming to the ordinance and preparation that the Lord ordained and prepared before the foundation of the world, for the salvation of the dead who should die without a knowledge of the gospel." There can be no mistake about the importance in Joseph Smith's mind



of connecting the dead and the living *through records*.

Verse 24 concludes: "Let us, therefore, as a church and a people, and as Latter-day Saints, offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness; and let us present in his holy temple, when it is finished, a book containing the records of our dead, which shall be worthy of all acceptation." If God knows every sparrow, he surely must know his children. I can't believe he needs our help to identify the dead. All this effort must be for our sakes—and for those other persons, once living, who remain connected to us.

Not too long ago, I was telling a historian from New York University about my work at the Family History Center. I told him how people from every walk of life fill our little room three times a week. People really do connect with the past, I said. As professionals we are sometimes contemptuous of popular history and of genealogy, but it is important.

"Yes," he answered, "as long as those people are doing something more than filling in crossword puzzles."

I suspect that some of the amateur genealogists who come to our center are engaged in a diversionary pastime, like doing crossword puzzles. I am sure that many Latter-day Saints also miss the larger significance of their work. My experience at the Family History Center tells me that most people who really get engaged in research are animated by something larger, however, that there is a spirit to genealogical research. Whether it comes from Elijah or Clio I cannot say. All I know is that the amateur researchers, mostly nonmembers, who come to our center week after week, have a glow about them as they follow the thin threads that lead them through the past.

It is true, however, that historical research and genealogical research are very different. When I go into a county courthouse to look at probate records, the clerks, assuming I am a genealogist, usually ask, "What name are you looking for?"

"All of them," I answer.

At the moment I am working on hundreds of probate inventories recorded in Hampshire County, Massachusetts, between 1690 and 1760. My objective is to understand more about the life of a woman named Hannah Barnard who left a marvelous oak cupboard with her own birth name painted on it when she died in 1717. It is not enough for me to know who Hannah's parents were or that her husband listed her furniture when he made his will in 1725 or that Hannah's granddaughter eventually inherited the cupboard. To fully understand Hannah's story, I need to understand the pattern of inheritance that made it difficult for early American women to transmit property from one generation to another. One name won't give me a pattern. Only by knowing "all of them" can I fully understand one of them.

My experience with Hannah's cupboard suggests the broader differences between Clio and Elijah. I became interested in the cupboard when I was asked to keynote a symposium on regional New England furniture held in conjunction with a set of exhibits at the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford, Massachusetts. One exhibit featured Hadley chests, a distinctive furniture form built in the Connecticut River Valley between 1680 and 1720. Hannah's cupboard

is a Hadley chest. When a reporter for the *Hartford Courant* saw the show, he saw a "protofeminist message" in Hannah's cupboard. Why else would a woman paint her maiden name in bold letters across a piece of furniture she took into marriage? A local furniture collector came to a very different conclusion. Since men controlled property in this period, the cupboard must have been a gift from Hannah's future husband. It was "a valentine in furniture." Each interpreter read twentieth-century experiences into an eighteenth-century cupboard. They wanted to connect present and past and draw personal meaning from that connection. They must have been inspired by Elijah.

The furniture historians assembled at the show were too high-minded to consider such questions. In their efforts to be objective, they focused on measurable attributes and on broad but definable characteristics. While acknowledging that the woman's name on the cupboard "made a strong statement" about her role "as keeper of the household and a major portion of its assets: valued textiles and silver," the catalog of the exhibit concentrated on stylistic analysis ("The Barnard cupboard was a stage for new Baroque concepts conveyed through traditional Hampshire County ornament") and on details that could be empirically affirmed (under polarized light microscopy the paint on the columns turned out to be a mixture of white lead and Prussian blue, an artificial pigment first synthesized in Berlin in 1704). The furniture scholars were tuned in to Clio.

Bringing Elijah's question to Clio's methods yields a very different result. Instead of backing away from contemporary questions, as the furniture scholars did, or collapsing present and past, as the newspaper reporter attempted to do, we can use our own deeply felt need to understand gender relations to motivate a broader search of the evidence. Furniture was a form of property as well as a decorative object, and a close examination of early records demonstrates that males and females typically inherited very different forms of property in early America. Wills and inventories not only distributed family resources across generations, but also defined gender. "Real property," or land, was normally passed from father to son. Women received most of their inheritance in "moveables"—pots, pans, featherbeds, cows, and such. This division was hardly neutral. As anthropologist Annette Weiner has shown, the western concept of "real property" (preserved in our use of the term "real estate") is the western European version of an ancient division between "alienable" and "inalienable" possessions. Inalienable possessions give the owners the ability to transcend death, perpetuating their names and identities across time. "Moveable" property, on the other hand, could be passed indiscriminately from one person to another. In western society, women were themselves moveables, changing their names and identities as they moved from one male-headed household to another.

The name on Hannah Barnard's cupboard made it less moveable. It was handed down through the female line, carrying Hannah's maiden name and memory with it. While there is no other cupboard exactly like Hannah's, there are hundreds of other household

objects marked in a similar way. In a world in which women became *femes couvert* at marriage, their identities legally subsumed in those of their husbands, marked spoons, chests, sheets, towels, and embroideries perpetuated female lineages. Female property was not simply a parallel form of male property, however. Tracing the provenance of household objects allows us to see how women created a less linear, less exclusive sense of "family," preserving multiple allegiances and multiple connections across time. Of course, men did that, too. Patrilineal naming patterns, like formal property law, obscure the real nature of kinship in early America. Following "male lines" from one generation to another misleads us into thinking that women were merely vehicles for perpetuating male lines of inheritance. Unfortunately, some of us perpetuate that fiction in our own genealogical research. Focusing on the top lines on our charts, we move the "moveables." As we redirect our attention toward all the lineages in our past, something marvelous happens. We are no longer part of the "Ulrich family" or the "Thatcher family." We become brothers and sisters across time.

I think it is significant that the Church now emphasizes family history rather than genealogy. Genealogy gives us the opportunity to relate to the dead one by one. History asks us to consider the larger human family of which we are a part. There may be less of a contradiction between the two than at first appears. In a fascinating essay in the *New Yorker* some years ago, Alex Shoumatoff wrote about the relationship between human history and the "mountain of names" being gathered in Salt Lake City. While each of our pedigrees grows exponentially as we move backward in time (two parents giving way to four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, sixteen great-great-grandparents, and so on), at some point every pedigree collapses in on itself, as remote ancestors from one line begin to overlap with those from another. Within fifty generations we are all part of the same family tree. "History can be seen," Shoumatoff concludes, "as a mosaic of billions of overlapping pedigrees" (60). Ironically, the more successful we are in tracing our own folks through time, the more we discover our relationship to others.

In Shoumatoff's words:

If all of us could be made aware of our multiple interrelatedness, if the same sort of altruism that usually exists among close kin could prevail through the entire human population, if this vision of ourselves could somehow catch on, then many of the differences that have polarized various subpopulations from the beginning of human history . . . . would seem secondary. (60)

Or, in the words of Malachi (an Old World prophet) reinterpreted by Moroni (a New World messenger):

Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet. . . . And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the

fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming. (H 1:38-39)

To summarize in broad terms, Elijah represents faith, Clio reason; Elijah unity between present and past, Clio distance; Elijah a quest for personal connection, Clio a search for broad patterns. What then are we to make of the fact that Elijah is male and Clio female? Is this one more example of the absurdity of gender stereotypes? The irony is deeper. Elijah, unlike Clio, actually has a history. He is not only the white-robed messenger who appeared to Joseph Smith in the Kirtland Temple in 1836. He is the inhabitant of Gilead who confounded the priests of Baal, raised the widow's son, and fasted forty days and nights on Mount Horeb. Even in Greek mythology, Clio remains an abstraction. The muse of history has no history. No place, no time, no defining stories are attached to her name.

She is like the Statue of Liberty in Susan Howe's trenchant poem, hollow, empty, consigned to hold a torch above her head, a book on her arm. In Susan's poem, Liberty finally has her say:

And the book, suggesting more  
Than it will ever give, weighs  
a ton. I want to put it down,  
Tell my visitors I know how  
Their lives go. I never will.  
I am huge, copper-weighted,  
Supporting the status of icon.

As a real person, Liberty might comfort her visitors, telling them she understands the vertigo of their stiff climb to the top. As a symbol, she can only stand there, holding up the torch years after year,

. . . Blood always draining  
From my arm, hand and wrist  
Always going numb.

If Clio ever was a real woman, her story is lost. She represents, then, all that has been lost from history as well as all that survives. Someone has estimated that "ninety percent of all the people who ever existed slipped into complete oblivion, without leaving even their names behind" (Shoumatoff 63). Although that Church has collected the names of almost two billion people, it will never discover the names of those whose records were destroyed by fire or war or who lived in societies without writing. Here is where Joseph Smith's vision of "a book containing the records of our dead" becomes important. Tomorrow's history is built on today's records. There is a lesson here, I think, for Latter-day Saint women. To honor Elijah we must turn our hearts to our mothers as well as our fathers. To give Clio a history, we must begin to keep our own.

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THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE OF THE  
BOOK OF MORMON: UPSTATE NEW YORK DIALECT,  
KING JAMES ENGLISH, OR HEBREW?

*Royal Skousen\**

John Gilbert, compositor for the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, was apparently the first to note the ungrammaticality of the original text of the Book of Mormon. In a later statement Gilbert recalled:

On the second day [of printing]--[Martin] Harris and [Hyrum] Smith being in the office--I called their attention to a grammatical error, and asked whether I should correct it? Harris consulted with Smith a short time, and turned to me and said: "The Old Testament is ungrammatical, set it as it is written." (xxix-xxxi)

Complaints about the grammar of the original text later led Joseph Smith to make numerous grammatical changes for the second edition of the Book of Mormon, published in 1837 in Kirtland, Ohio. Over the years, other editors have continued to make minor changes in the text. As a consequence, the language of our current text of the Book of Mormon differs in a number of important ways from the original text. Even the 1830 edition--as well as the printer's manuscript--accidentally corrects some nonstandard forms that occurred in the original, dictated manuscript. The basic thrust of nearly all these changes has been to remove grammatical uses that are nonstandard in modern English.<sup>1</sup>

Interestingly, many of these editorial changes have removed

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<sup>1</sup>For an overview of this editing process, see 42-50 of Royal Skousen, "Towards a Critical Edition of the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 41-69.

expressions that are characteristic of the language of the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. For instance, in passages quoting Isaiah, double plurals such as seraphims have been replaced by the appropriate plural form (in this case, seraphim), as in 2 Nephi 16:6:

then flew one of the seraphims unto me > seraphim (1920)  
<original B of M text = KJV Isaiah 6:6>

Similarly, uses of which have been changed to who or whom (or sometimes that) when the referent is human, as in 3 Nephi 13:9 when the Lord's prayer is quoted:

our father which art in heaven > who (1837)  
<original B of M text = KJV Matthew 6:9>

Other examples of ungrammatical King James expressions that have been systematically removed from the Book of Mormon text include the conjunction that when preceded by a subordinate conjunction, the preposition for when followed by the infinitive marker to, and the prepositional a when followed by a verbal ending in -ing:

because that he was a visionary man [1 Nephi 2:11]  
> ø (1837)  
cf. because that in it he had rested [Genesis 2:3]

after their many struggles for to destroy them (Alma 27:1)  
> ø (1837)  
cf. all their works they do for to be seen of men  
[Matthew 23:5]

the armies of the Lamanites are a marching towards the city  
of Cumeni [Alma 57:31] > ø (1837)  
cf. I go a fishing [John 21:3]

Of course, many of the ungrammatical forms in the original text of the Book of Mormon can be explained as nonstandard dialectal forms, as in the following examples:

they was yet wroth [1 Nephi 4:4] > were (1830)

I had smote [1 Nephi 4:19] > smitten (1830)

this shall be your language in them days [Helaman 13:37]  
> those (1837)

In fact, it is sometimes difficult to unambiguously identify the source of a nonstandard form. For instance, many of the ungrammatical King James expressions could also be explained as nonstandard American dialectal forms. Thus, which can occur instead of who, as it does in chapter 17 of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*:

. . . two young women which I couldn't see right well. (133)

Similarly, Willard Richards's entry for 13 December 1841 in Joseph Smith's Illinois Journal has an occurrence of because that:

the inhabitants of Warsaw . . . were much enraged because that Esquire David . . . was appointed clerk of the county by Judge Douglass. (Jessee, *Papers*, 342)

And we have Joseph Smith's use of for to in his 1832 history:

but the Lord had prepared spectacles for to read the Book. (Jessee, *Personal*, 8)

One important question has been the origin of the ungrammaticality in the original text of the Book of Mormon: If we accept Joseph Smith's claim that the translation was inspired of God, do we have to accept the nonstandard forms as also coming from God? B. H. Roberts argued that such a claim would be tantamount to blasphemy:

If . . . it is insisted that the divine instrument, Urim and Thummim, did all . . . then the divine instrument is responsible for such errors in grammar and diction as occur. But this is to assign responsibility for errors in language to a divine instrumentality, which amounts to assigning such errors to God. But that is unthinkable, not to say blasphemous. (428-29)

Of course, the implication of this argument is that if God had given the English translation word for word, then he would have given it in B. H. Robert's proper English and not Joseph Smith's upstate New York dialect. It seems to me that since God is not a native speaker of English nor a respecter of tongues, he is perfectly willing to speak to his "servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding" (D&C 1:24). In fact, internal evidence from the original manuscript as well as statements from witnesses of the translation provide strong support that the Lord exercised "tight control" over the translation process and that he indeed is the source for the original text of the Book of Mormon (cf. Skousen 51-54). From this perspective, Joseph Smith's editing for the second edition of the Book of Mormon may be viewed as translating the text into standard English rather than cleaning up grammatical errors (Skousen 55-56).

Such an open attitude encourages us to take a fresh look at the text of the Book of Mormon, in particular the original text. This kind of approach to the text will, I believe, lead us to realize that the Book of Mormon text is more sophisticated than we might have thought. Consider, for instance, what linguists refer to as multiple nested embedding, a kind of sentential chiasmus. In



this structure we have a sequence of subjects followed by a sequence of matching predicates such that the earlier the subject the later its corresponding predicate. In an important study, Carol Hicks, currently a graduate student in linguistics at Stanford University, has provided a number of examples of multiple nested embeddings:

The question  
    that linguists  
        who  
            study this matter  
        have debated  
is whether  
    nesting  
    can occur to the level of two.

The apartments  
    the guy  
        I  
            dated last year  
    lived in  
had a jacuzzi.

The book  
    that the teacher of the class  
        that I'm  
            taking  
    told us to get  
is out of print.

The first example of a bona fide multiple nested embedding was discovered about five years ago by Kent Chauncey, a graduate student in linguistics at Brigham Young University (77-78). Erle Stanley Gardner, under the pseudonym A. A. Fair, produced this example of multiple nested embedding in *Bachelors Get Lonely*:

The card  
    the man  
        I  
            was shadowing  
    had filled out  
was on the table. (85)

Interestingly, Hicks has discovered an example of this same complex syntactic structure in 3 Nephi 5:14:

and it  
hath become expedient  
    that I

according to the will of God  
that the prayers of those  
which  
have gone hence  
which  
were the holy ones  
should be fulfilled according to their faith  
should make a record of these things  
which  
have been done

One of the interesting complexities of the original text of the Book of Mormon is that it contains expressions that appear to be uncharacteristic of English in all of its dialects and historical stages. These structures support the notion that Joseph Smith's translation is a literal one and not simply a reflection of either his own dialect or King James English. For instance, in the original text of the Book of Mormon we find a number of occurrences of a Hebrew-like conditional clause. In English, we have conditional clauses like "if you come, then I will come", with then being optional. In Hebrew this same clause is expressed as "if you come and I will come." In the original text of the Book of Mormon, there were at least fourteen occurrences of this non-English expression. One occurrence was accidentally removed in 1 Nephi 17:50 as Oliver Cowdery was producing the printer's manuscript (P) by copying from the original manuscript (O):

if he should command me that I should say unto this water be  
thou earth and it shall be earth (O) > ø, should (P)

The remaining thirteen occurrences were all removed by Joseph Smith in his editing for the second edition, including this one from the famous passage in Moroni 10:4:

and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart with real intent  
having faith in Christ and he will manifest the truth of it  
unto you > ø (1837)

This use of and is not due to scribal error, especially since this if-and expression occurs seven times in one brief passage, Helaman 12:13-21:

13 yea and if he sayeth unto the earth move and it is moved >  
ø (1837)

14 yea if he sayeth unto the earth thou shalt go back that it  
lengthen out the day for many hours and it is done ...  
> ø (1837)

16 and behold also if he sayeth unto the waters of the great  
deep be thou dried up and it is done > ø (1837)

17 behold if he sayeth unto this mountain be thou raised up  
and come over and fall upon that city that it be buried  
up and behold it is done . . . > ø (1837)

19 and if the Lord shall say be thou accursed that no man  
shall find thee from this time henceforth and forever and  
behold no man getteth it henceforth and forever > ø -  
(1837)

20 and behold if the Lord shall say unto a man because of  
thine iniquities thou shalt be accursed forever and it  
shall be done > ø (1837)

21 and if the Lord shall say because of thine iniquities thou  
shalt be cut off from my presence and he will cause that  
it shall be so > ø (1837)

Finally, the original text of the Book of Mormon contains expressions which seem inappropriate or improper in some of their uses. For example, in the original text a good many occurrences of the phrase "and it came to pass" are found in inappropriate contexts. In his editing for the 1837 edition, Joseph Smith removed at least forty-seven of these apparently extraneous uses of this well-worked phrase. In most cases, there were two or more examples of "it came to pass" in close proximity; in some cases, nothing new had "come to pass." Now the King James phrase "and it came to pass" corresponds to the Hebrew word /wayehi/ "and it happened." When translating the Hebrew Bible, the King James translators avoided translating /wayehi/ whenever it wouldn't make sense in English, especially when too many events were "coming to pass" or when nothing had really "come to pass"--in other words, in those very places that the original text of the Book of Mormon "inappropriately" allows "and it came to pass" to occur. Consider the following three Book of Mormon examples with corresponding examples from Genesis, given in the King James version, but with the originally untranslated examples of the Hebrew /wayehi/ given as "it came to pass that" and placed in square brackets:

(1) two occurrences within the same sentence:

2 Nephi 4:10

and it came to pass that when my father had made an end  
of speaking unto them behold it came to pass that he  
spake unto the sons of Ishmael yea and even all his  
household > ø (1837)

Genesis 27:30

and it came to pass as soon as Isaac had made an end of  
blessing Jacob and [it came to pass that] Jacob was yet  
scarce gone out from the presence of Isaac his father  
that Esau his brother came in from his hunting

Note here that the first use of "it came to pass" controls only a subordinate clause and thus the second "it came to pass" seems inappropriate for English speakers. Thus Joseph Smith removed the second occurrence in his later editing, just as the King James translators chose to ignore the second /wayehi/ in the Genesis passage.

(2) three occurrences close together, with repetition of clausal elements:

Alma 8:18-19

now it came to pass that after Alma had received his message from the angel of the Lord he returned speedily to the land of Ammonihah and it came to pass that he entered the city by another way yea by the way which was on the south of the city Ammonihah and it came to pass that as he entered the city he was an hungered and he sayeth to a man will ye give to an humble servant of God something to eat > ø, ø (1837)

Genesis 35:16-18

and they journeyed from Bethel and [it came to pass that] there was but a little way to come to Ephrath and Rachel travailed and she had hard labour and it came to pass when she was in hard labour that the midwife said unto her fear not thou shalt have this son also and it came to pass as her soul was in departing for she died that she called his name Benoni but his father called him Benjamin

(3) two occurrences, with parallelism:

Alma 14:4-5

but it came to pass that they did not [put them away privily] but they took them and bound them with strong cords and took them before the chief judge of the land and the people went forth and witnessed against them <followed by a list of charges> and many such things did the people testify against Alma and Amulek and it came to pass that it was done before the chief judge of the land > now this (1837)

Genesis 39:5

and it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house and over all that he had that the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake and [it came to pass that] the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house and in the field

In these two examples "it came to pass" is used to repeat an idea without anything "coming to pass".

All these examples would suggest that /wayehi/ and the correspond-

ing English phrase "and it came to pass" actually represents a discourse marker facilitating narrative cohesion. Perhaps it may be considered equivalent to and then or and so.

Although these examples suggest a Hebrew basis underlying the original text of the Book of Mormon, some caution is in order. Just because two languages have similar syntactic constructions does not demonstrate that they are related languages. For instance, both Hebrew and Russian as well as pidgin English omit the present tense form of the be verb (thus producing sentences like "he the man" and "she good"). But this is not evidence that Russian is derived from Hebrew--or that Hebrew is derived from Hawaiian pidgin. There are some close syntactic connections between Hebrew and the original language of the Book of Mormon, but some of these may be due to independent historical development rather than linguistic relationship.

What is important here is to realize that the original text of the Book of Mormon apparently contains expressions that are not characteristic of English at any place or time, in particular neither Joseph Smith's upstate New York dialect nor the King James Bible. Subsequent editing of the text into standard English has systematically removed these non-English expressions from the text--the very expressions that provide the strongest support for the hypothesis that the Book of Mormon is a literal translation of a non-English text. Further, the potential Hebraisms found in the original text are consistent with the belief, but do not prove, that the source text is related to the language of the Hebrew Bible.

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**TASTE AND FEAST:  
IMAGES OF EATING AND DRINKING  
IN THE BOOK OF MORMON**

*Richard Dilworth Rust\**

"You are what you eat," the adage goes. Turning that around, Jean Savarin in his treatise on eating, *The Physiology of Taste*, says: "Tell me what thou eatest, and I will tell thee what thou art" (qtd. in Farb and Armelagos 3). This is true in the Book of Mormon, in which literal and metaphorical references to eating and drinking (or the lack thereof) define the essential nature of people, characterize social relationships, emphasize problems of survival, illustrate degradation, reinforce covenants, poetically define a hope for eternal life, and suggest a response to the book as a whole. These images support a point made by Peter Farb and George Armelagos in their book, *Consuming Passions: The Anthropology of Eating*, that because of "values that go far beyond filling the stomach, eating becomes associated if only at an unconscious level, with deep-rooted sentiments and assumptions about oneself and the world one lives in" (97).

In the Book of Mormon, this deep-rootedness is found in the sacramental implications of eating and drinking. The word sacrament has "sacredness" as part of its root meaning and implies sacrifice --an offering to God paradoxically made by acceptance of the bread and wine God offers. The word *Eucharist* comes from a Greek word meaning "thanksgiving"; and the word *communion* implies sharing, even possession in common. These meanings are all contained in the Lord's sacrament and feasts described in Third Nephi. There we find

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communion of the faithful, a representation of the Savior's atonement, a meal of the kingdom, and an invocation of the Spirit.

Initially in the Book of Mormon, food and drink take on enormous significance as pertaining to the matter of survival or perishing in the wilderness. Lehi discovers in the brass plates that he is descended from Joseph who preserved his family from perishing with famine (1 Ne. 5:14); likewise, in the wilderness he and Nephi have primary responsibility for preserving Lehi's family--with correspondences to the children of Israel in the wilderness (1 Ne. 17:28-29; Mosiah 7:19). As is affirmed frequently, this preservation ultimately comes from the Lord and is dependent on the people's righteousness (cf. 1 Ne. 16:39; 1 Ne. 17:3). "Can God spread a table in the wilderness?" the Psalmist asks (Psalm 78:19), and the answer is yes--on condition of obedience. Through disobedience, however, Lehi's family comes close to perishing--with the irony that the same brothers who contemplate leaving Nephi in the wilderness "to be devoured by wild beasts" (1 Ne. 7:16) are saved by him (2 Ne. 1:24).

The drastically different responses of Nephi and Laman to eating and drinking are found in Lehi's Tree of Life vision--which Bruce Jorgensen appropriately considers a controlling metaphor in the Book of Mormon. The context for this dream is the family's being engaged in gathering "together all manner of seeds of every kind, both of grain of every kind, and also of the seeds of fruit of every kind." This information is followed by Nephi's statement, "And it came to pass that while my father tarried in the wilderness he spake unto us, saying: Behold, I have dreamed a dream; or, in other words, I have seen a vision" (1 Ne. 8:1-2).

While initially not apparently related (although part of the same paragraph in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon), these verses are an excellent example of how the Book of Mormon understates matters and lets the reader discover connections between important points. Lehi and his family had been gathering "seeds of fruit of every kind." Presumably, to get the seeds they would have first eaten the fruit (or sampled it, at least), and have been getting their "year's supply," all the while focusing on physical survival. Like Robert Frost's apple picker who dreams of magnified apples, it would be natural for Lehi, the fruit picker, to dream of fruit in an archetypal way. Reporting his dream, Lehi says the fruit of the tree of life "was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted" (v. 11). Presumably, they had all been tasting fruit, so the comparison is rooted in their immediate experience. Lehi affirms that the fruit "was desirable above all other fruit" (1 Ne. 8:12); again, in his dream he beckoned his family to "partake of the fruit, which was desirable above all other fruit" (1 Ne. 8:15). He would know this since he had tasted the "fruit of every kind," of which he had gathered seeds. The fruit of the tree of life is a spiritual fruit, the love of Christ, and exceeds in value any physical fruit. This is a lesson Nephi tests out and accepts; Laman and Lemuel cannot get beyond the physical fruit.

Subsequently, Nephi and his followers are described as agriculturalists; conversely, in their degradation the Lamanites

feed "upon beasts of prey" and many of them eat nothing save raw meat (Enos 1:4, 20). Jarom says of the Lamanites of his time, "They loved murder and would drink the blood of beasts" (Jarom 1:6). While eating raw meat is generally deplored, there are exceptions. In their necessity, Lehi and his family eat uncooked meat which is made sweet unto them. Indeed, this is evidence of God's approval: "If it so be that the children of men keep the commandments of God he doth nourish them, and strengthen them, and provide means whereby they can accomplish the thing which he has commanded them" (1 Ne. 17:3).

Social relations between the Nephites and Lamanites and within these cultures are in part defined through offering or denying food and drink. In all societies, anthropologists Farb and Armelagos say, "eating is the primary way of initiating and maintaining human relationships. In fact, the English word 'companion' is derived from French and Latin words that mean 'one who eats bread with another'" (4). In the Eastern world out of which the Book of Mormon peoples came, to admit a stranger to the table was always a sign of friendship as well as an implied offer of protection.<sup>1</sup> A poignant Book of Mormon example of this kind of offer is Amulek's willing response to the hungry Alma's plea, "Will ye give to an humble servant of God something to eat?" (Alma 8:19). Amulek's response brings Alma's blessing. At the end of their missionary service together, Alma reciprocates this generosity (Alma 15:18). Conversely, the hard-hearted people of Ammonihah throw Alma and Amulek into prison and deprive them of food and water (Alma 14:22). The Lamanites do the same to Nephi and Lehi (Hel. 5:22), although their hearts are subsequently softened by a conversion experience. Likewise, the Sons of Mosiah initially suffer hunger, thirst, and fatigue (Alma 17:5). The cruelest deprivation is the Jaredite Akish's imprisoning his son and starving him to death (Eth. 9:7).

At the opposite end of the kind of behavior Akish exhibits is living the law of consecration. The church in the early years of Alma's reign, we are told, "did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, . . . having no respect to persons as to those who stood in need" (Alma 1:30). Sadly, they soon are lifted up with pride to the point of "turning their backs upon the needy and the naked and those who were hungry, and those who were athirst" (Alma 4:12). The plight of the deprived people reminds one of Christ's words from the cross, "I thirst" (John 19:28).

A temporary deprivation of food and water in the form of a fast is the sign of a disciple, who then is provided for by the Lord, having taken no thought what he should eat or drink (Alma 31:37; 3 Ne. 13:25, 13:31). However, long-term deprivation in the form of famine is usually a major result of war and often described

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<sup>1</sup>See William Barclay, *The Lord's Supper* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1967), 95. Barclay also writes of the eastern custom of satisfying a treaty or covenant with a common meal (see Exod. 24:11).



as a punishment for wickedness (cf. Mosiah 9:3, 12:4; Alma 10:22; Eth. 9:28). A striking miracle in this regard is Nephi's calling on divine power to smite the earth with famine (Hel. 10:6).

Excessive eating and drinking are also signs of spiritual weakness. Zeniff describes the people of king Laman as "a lazy and an idolatrous people" who want to bring Zeniff's people into bondage so as to "glut themselves with the labors of our hands," to "feast themselves upon the flocks of our fields" (Mosiah 9:12). Winebibbing sets up Laban's execution and provides a stratagem for the Nephite ally Laman to overpower the Lamanite guards (Alma 55:8ff). Also metaphorically, drinking can be negative. Carnal people, King Benjamin preaches, "drink damnation to their own souls except they humble themselves and become as little children" (Mosiah 3:18). Those whose works have been evil, Alma says, will "drink the dregs of a bitter cup" (Alma 40:26). For his part, Christ drank "out of that bitter cup which the Father" gave him so as to spare the repentant (3 Ne. 11:11).

The extreme opposite of sacramental uses of eating and drinking is anthropophagy or cannibalism.<sup>2</sup> While only a small window is opened on cannibalism in the Book of Mormon, it is sufficient to signal the degradation of the Lamanites and the even more extreme degradation of the Nephites. Eating human flesh is introduced in passages from Isaiah: "I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; they shall be drunken with their own blood as with sweet wine" (1 Nephi 21:26). The evil Amalickiah swears with an oath that he will drink Captain Moroni's blood (Alma 49:27). In the last destructive battles, Lamanites feed Nephite women upon the flesh of their husbands and children upon the flesh of their fathers (Moro. 9:8). Wicked Nephites "thirst after blood and revenge continually" (Moro. 9:5). The most horrifying cannibalism is that of the perverted Nephites who raped the Lamanite women and then, according to Mormon's report to Moroni, "did murder them in a most cruel manner, torturing their bodies even unto death; and after they have done this, they devour their flesh like unto wild beasts, because of the hardness of their hearts; and they do it for a token of bravery" (Moro. 9:10).

While at this point the Nephites are not entirely destroyed, they are fully fallen as a people. Looking at the whole Book of Mormon, this violated flesh of death is a complete perversion of the sacramental fruit of the Tree of Life introduced in Lehi's dream and developed so beautifully by Alma. Alma beckons his auditors, for example, to come and be baptized and thus "partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely" (Alma 5:62, 34). The culmination of reverential partaking of the fruit of the tree of life is

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<sup>2</sup>Nowhere in the Book of Mormon is there acceptance of the argument made in Peter Gzowski's *The Sacrament: A True Story of Survival* (New York: Atheneum, 1980), or the current film, *Alive*, both about survival after a plane crash, that eating human flesh can be sacramental.

found in the event anticipated from the book's first pages: the visit of the resurrected Christ to the "more righteous part" of the people in the New World. He twice administers the sacrament through his disciples to the gathered multitude, the second time providing bread and wine miraculously. As the divine host at the feast, Christ shows there is enough and for all, both of the bounties of the earth and of God's inexhaustible love. Partaking of the bread and wine, the disciples are physically filled but, more importantly, are "filled with the Spirit" according to the Savior's promise that their souls would "never hunger nor thirst, but shall be filled" (3 Ne. 20:9, 8). Subsequently, for several generations the Nephites keep the sacramental covenant of sharing by having all things in common (3 Ne. 26:19; 4 Ne. 1:3).

While the visit of Jesus is the climax of the Book of Mormon, the dénouement is the other major event prophesied by Lehi and subsequent prophets: the total destruction of the Nephite people and implied spiritual and cultural darkness for a long time afterward of the Lamanites. This is witnessed by Mormon and Moroni, who regularly remind us that their perspective is from the time of the final devastation. Yet they present the extremes of the sacramental and the anti-sacramental. We have seen how the latter is defined sharply in the passage on cannibalism. The sacramental is found in Moroni's quoting the prayers used by the disciples of Christ in "administering the flesh and blood of Christ unto the church" as a remembrance of his sacrifice.

Moroni uses richly poetic language in his anticipation of a millennial time when humankind "may be persuaded to do good continually, that they may come unto the fountain of all righteousness and be saved" (Eth. 8:26). He echoes earlier poetic appeals which draw on the imagery of eating and drinking. "Come, my brethren," Jacob pleads, "every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price" (2 Ne. 9:50). "Receive the pleasing word of God," he says, "and feast upon his love" (Jacob 3:2). Alma says, "Because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word in nourishing it, that it may take root in you, behold, by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst" (Alma 32:40-42). "How oft have I gathered you," Jesus says, "as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and have nourished you" (3 Ne. 10:4).

These metaphors exemplify the richness of the imagery of eating and drinking in the Book of Mormon in which King Benjamin's people taste of God's love (Mosiah 4:11), Alma tastes light and joy (Alma 32:35, 36:24), Mormon tastes and knows of the goodness of Jesus (Morm. 1:15), and those who "hunger and thirst after righteousness" shall "be filled with the Holy Ghost" (3 Ne. 12:6) and feast upon the word of Christ (2 Ne. 31:20, 32:3). Granted that the iron rod is the word of God, the fruit of the tree of life is

also the word of God--delicious to the taste. As the Psalmist says, "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Ps. 119:103). For those who accept "the Book of Mormon to be the word of God" (8th Article of Faith) and are nourished by it (cf. Moro. 6:4), the Book of Mormon itself could be considered a tree of life--a work of beauty and purity, with its words to be feasted upon. (It could also be metaphorically a tree of knowledge, containing bitter as well as sweet fruit [cf. 2 Ne. 2:15]).

In sum, the Book of Mormon employs images of eating and drinking or the absence of them to develop implications of survival, social relations, and covenants. Especially it functions richly in its metaphorical use of these images. It calls to those who approach it, "Taste and feast."

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## THE INEFFABLE MADE EFFABLE:

### RENDERING JOSEPH SMITH'S FIRST VISION AS LITERATURE

Richard H. Cracroft\*

#### I

. . . just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. . . . When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other--*This is My Beloved Son, Hear Him!* (JS--H 1:16-17)<sup>1</sup>

This attempt by Joseph Smith, Jr., to render the ineffable as effable, to recreate in words the appearance of God the Father and God the Son to him in the spring of 1820, has become, over time, not only the foundational document and "fountainhead" of the Restoration (Backman, "First Vision," 515; Backman, *Joseph Smith*, Bushman 49ff), but a touchstone of faith and orthodoxy for the Latter-day Saints, whose "importance," writes James B. Allen, "is

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<sup>1</sup>See also Dean C. Jessee, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984): 3-8; Milton V. Backman, Jr., *Joseph Smith's First Vision: The First Vision in Its Historical Context* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971).

second only to belief in the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth" (Allen 29; see also Lambert and Cracroft; Allen, "Emergence"; Hill).

The First Vision, as Joseph dictated it in 1838 for *The History of the Church* and as canonized in 1880 as part of *The Pearl of Great Price*, is the mucilage of Mormonism, the unifying dynamic common to every Latter-day Saint. Paraphrasing Ernest Hemingway on *Huckleberry Finn*, we might assert that all of Mormonism comes from one event experienced by Joseph Smith called the First Vision. Indeed, all of Joseph Smith's subsequent revelations--and those of his successors in the First Presidency of the Church--reverberate with that First Vision, replete with a complex of meanings for Latter-day Saints of every spiritual and intellectual degree of glory.

Joseph Smith's account, evolving as it did over time and through numerous tellings, is a powerful literary *tour de force* which not only centers Smith's "charismatic authority" (Bloom 7) and authenticates and presents compelling evidence for Joseph's divine call to prophethood, but also reifies what Harold Bloom has called Smith's "authentic religious genius" and his "uncanny" religion-making knowledge as "the most gifted . . . of all American prophets" (82, 110, 127).

The vision also establishes, or "restores," the emerging doctrine of an anthropomorphic God and theomorphic humankind, clarifies the being and relationship among the personages of the godhead, and elucidates the pattern of the relationship between the godhead and human beings through continuing revelation, not only from God to his prophets, but also from God to individual men and women--thereby promoting the faith-vitalizing, "thou art chosen" expectation in every believer of the possibility and imminence of his or her own Sacred Grove experience.

For all of these reasons, the First Vision is vital to the Saints' becoming a "people." Repeated and heartfelt recitations of, and testimonies sought and gained and uttered, have transformed the vision into that kind of "profound" story which, posits Neil Postman, provides an "organizing framework" which gives a people direction and enables them to "make sense out of the world" by providing a "theory about how the world works" (122-23). The First Vision is integral to the Mormon story and the Mormon people.

In the 150 years since Joseph Smith's death, twenty-four years following that First Vision, several generations of poets, dramatists, and writers of fiction have attempted, with varying success, to come to grips with the importance of the event, reifying the vision for their generations' consistories--reentering the Sacred Grove again and again through recounting, redacting, re-viewing, and re-rendering Joseph's experience in ways appropriate to their literary and didactic purposes. The results are interesting, instructive, indicative, and even, if sometimes disappointing, hopeful and thus promising.

Even a cursory survey of some of the poetry, drama and fiction generated by the First Vision demonstrates not only the firm and intimidating grip which Joseph Smith's revered recounting of the event has fastened upon Restoration poets and authors, but also

discloses how imaginative contemporary Latter-day Saint writers are in finding innovative ways of examining, expanding, and universalizing Joseph's experience in the Sacred Grove to meet the spiritual needs of generations of Mormons "who knew not Joseph," but whose lives continue to be affected by his remarkable encounters with Deity.

## II

Harold Bloom, in his refreshing and invigorating study of Joseph Smith and Mormonism, prophesies (secularly) that "a major American poet . . . some time in the future will write [the Mormon story] as the epic it was." Indeed, "Nothing else in all of American history strikes me," he continues, "as *materia poetica* equal to the early history of Joseph Smith" and his followers (79), and he calls for "strong poets, major novelists, [and] accomplished dramatists [probably Gentiles] . . . to tell [Joseph's] history" (127).

William Mulder, however, long ago anticipated and muted Bloom's clarion call for a Mormon epic with some hard-headed realities about the challenge of rendering the ineffable effable, about the difficulty of transforming the stuff of Mormonism and the matter of the First Vision into literature: "God, the best storyteller," he paraphrases Bernard DeVoto as stating, "made a better story out of Joseph and the Mormon wandering than fiction will ever equal" (210).

So strong was the personality of Joseph Smith, Jr., however, and so powerfully clear, honest, authoritative, and definitive is his rendering of the experience, that subsequent attempts at retelling the First Vision pale and shrink in comparison to the original and bring one to ask why anyone would desire to retell, refurbish, or re-render the event.

The challenge is formidable: To render in the right words and tone, without diminishing or sentimentalizing, trivializing or hyperbolizing, that awe and grandeur which approximate the experience itself--to render effable the vertical, the mantic, the transcendent, the spiritual, the ineffable; to transform a timeless event which has become sacralized and mythologized and thus heroic into a credible and accessible horizontal literature. It is a "consummation devoutly to be wished," a challenge not unlike calling for fiction which renders effable and credible but still sacred and transcendent the resurrection of Jesus Christ (notwithstanding attempts by Nicholas Kazantzakis, Jim Bishop, and Lloyd Douglas).

Though Joseph Smith, having refined his rendering of the First Vision through his 1832, 1835, 1838, and 1842 recountings of the event, never attempted to render his experience in any other literary form, he would attempt in a poem entitled "The Vision"--perhaps with W. W. Phelps's assistance--to render in ballad stanzas his February 16, 1832, vision, at Hiram, Ohio, better known as Section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants:

I, Joseph, the prophet, in spirit beheld,  
And the eyes of the inner man truly did see  
Eternity sketch'd in a vision from God,  
Of what was, and now is, and yet is to be.

And the glory of God shone around where I was,  
And there was the Son at the Father's right hand,  
In a fulness of glory and holy applause.<sup>2</sup>

It not only becomes painfully evident that Joseph's (or Phelps's) verse does not rise to the level of its subject, but also that the poet, with future generations of Latter-day Saint writers, is subject to the realities of historical tyranny--he cannot free himself, for imaginative artistic purposes, from the assertive facts of "how it really was." Joseph's (or Phelps's) probable intent in recasting the vision of the three degrees of glory was the same as most future writers' intentions in recasting and retelling the First Vision--to teach it to the uninformed, to remind the believer, to inspire all who read the recounting, and to testify of the event and of Joseph's prophethood--and to achieve all of that without irreverencing the original, sacralized account, without sounding a dissonant note in the minds of faithful Latter-day Saints who resist attempts to vary "the truth," as Joseph saw and recorded it.

### III

For many years, since its first publication in 1878, George Manwaring's hymn, "Joseph Smith's First Prayer," endured--and endures presently--as the authorized standard poetic alternative to Joseph's own account of the First Vision. In fact, the hymn, inspired in part by C. C. Christensen's painting, *The First Vision*, has become for many the initial and enduring entry into the vision. Manwaring not only superimposes on the Sacred Grove two initial lines borrowed (from American composer Sylvanus Billings Pond) to create a poetic associationism harmonizing nature with God's purposes, but he also sets for all time, in beloved narrative verse, the received standard tone in dealing with the event, a tone imparting "Praise to [that] Man who communed with Jehovah!"--whom kings "shall extol . . . and nations revere" (*Hymns* 27). "Joseph Smith's First Prayer," apparently heavily revised by the editors of the *Juvenile Instructor*, in which it first appeared (Davidson 54-

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<sup>2</sup>"The Vision From Joseph Smith to W. W. Phelps, Esq.," first published in the *Times and Seasons* and later in the *Millennial Star* 4 (August 1843): 4; also in N. B. Lundwall, comp., *The Vision* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, n.d.); and Cracroft and Lambert, *A Believing People*, 258-66. See also Michael Hicks, "Joseph Smith, W. W. Phelps, and the Poetic Paraphrase of the 'The Vision,'" *Journal of Mormon History* 20.2 (Fall 1994): in press, who marshals the evidence for seeing Phelps as the sole author.

55), continues to illuminate the Sacred Grove:

Oh how lovely was the morning.  
Radiant beamed the sun above.  
Bees were humming, sweet birds singing,  
Music ringing through the grove.  
When within the shady woodland  
Joseph sought the God of love.

Humbly kneeling, sweet appealing,  
'Twas the boy's first uttered prayer--  
When the powers of sin assailing,  
Filled his soul with deep despair;  
But undaunted, still he trusted  
In his Heavenly Father's care.

Suddenly a light descended  
Brighter far than noon-day sun,  
And a shining glorious pillar  
O'er him fell, around him shone.  
While appeared two heav'nly beings,  
God the Father and the Son.

"Joseph, this is my Beloved, Hear him!"  
Oh, how sweet the word!  
Joseph's humble prayer was answered,  
And he listened to the Lord.  
Oh, what rapture filled his bosom,  
For he saw the living God. (*Hymns* 26)

Bowing to the primacy of Joseph's own account and Manwaring's hymnal rendering, "The First Vision," reprinted from the Pearl of Great Price as the longstanding missionary tract, "Joseph Smith Tells His Own Story," remained undisturbed by Mormon or Gentile authors until well into the twentieth century. Joseph Smith himself, of course, was often *materia poetica* during the last half of the nineteenth century, featured in such various poems as Hannah Tapfield King's "An Epic Poem," Louisa L. Greene Richards's "The Three Josephs," and Orson F. Whitney's ambitious but turgid *Elias: An Epic of the Ages* (100-01, 103). Not until Alfred Osmond's epic-length poem, *The Exiles* (1926), couched in the jogging cadences of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "Hiawatha," do we discover another poetic, often skillful, and decidedly orthodox, rendering of the First Vision:

Kneeling down to ask the Father  
For the wisdom that he needed,  
He was forced into a conflict,  
With an agency of evil  
That was seeking to destroy him.

Just how long the struggle lasted



He perhaps could never answer;  
 But when on the verge of falling  
 In the hands of his opponent,  
 He beheld a light descending  
 Brighter than the sun at noonday.  
 When it circled round about him,  
 He beheld two persons standing  
 In the brilliant light above him.  
 God the Father, introducing  
 His Beloved, the Redeemer,  
 Told the boy that he should listen  
 To the teachings of the Savior.  
 Simple, frank, yet firm and fearless  
 Is the strange, supernal story  
 Of the boy who sought for wisdom  
 In the grove where he encountered  
 All the potency of evil;  
 And when he was weak and helpless,  
 Saw the brilliant light descending,  
 Saw the glorified Redeemer,  
 Saw the presence of the Godhead,  
 And was told he had a mission  
 To perform among the people. (20-21)

A half-century later, in 1979, R. Paul Cracroft, in his blank-verse, book-length epic, *A Certain Testimony*, advances the Book of Mormon story by telling of Joseph's entry into the book's history through the First Vision and the subsequent appearances of Moroni. Cracroft stresses in his rendering Joseph's coming role as founder of the Church and varies from Joseph's telling by having Joseph recount the First Vision to his parents, whom Richard Bushman claims were apparently left in the dark regarding any details of the vision:<sup>3</sup>

Believe me when I say that when I next  
 Sense death that near, I'll die. And almost did.  
 As breath and blood drained out of me, I cried  
 To God and have no way to say if sound  
 Broke out or stayed inside my tortured lungs.  
 Had He not somehow heard, I'd be there yet,

. . . But at my terror's height  
 I saw a shaft of light above my head.  
 . . . Inside that light I saw

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<sup>3</sup>Bushman insists that Joseph's failure to tell the vision to his parents, "gave Lucy a misunderstanding of the sequence of Joseph's vision that she had trouble correcting," and forced her to resort, in her own history, to citing Joseph's already extant description of the vision (58).

Two men I can't describe except to say  
 They looked like angels ought to look. One spoke--  
 He even knew my name!--and said of Him  
 Who stood beside Him in the pillared light,  
 "Beloved is my first begotten Son  
 Who rules the Heavens with me. Hear ye Him!"

The vision broke as fast as it had come.  
 I found myself supine, the leaves a-dance  
 Where stood the shaft of light, the grove at peace--  
 As I had found it when I came. I tell  
 You this in testimony of the truth  
 I've learned: that if God's Church can yet be found  
 On earth, my hand will help to raise it up.  
 (Bk. XII, 411-12)

#### IV

In fiction, as well, Joseph Smith's account of the First Vision casts a long, if infrequent, shadow. Again, Joseph Smith plays a secondary role in numerous novels, including *The Mormon Prophet* (1899), Lily Dougall's little-known, surprisingly well-written, unusual, turn-of-century novel, which treats of Joseph Smith's seductive psychological and hypnotic powers. In fact, Joseph crops up as a presence in numerous works of fiction: fleetingly, in Judith Freeman's *The Chinchilla Farm* (79), heroically and lovingly in Dean Hughes's historical novel for young readers, *Under the Same Stars* (16), wonderingly, in Sharon Downing Jarvis's *The Kaleidoscope Season* (306-07), influentially, in Virginia Sorensen's *A Little Lower than The Angels*; importantly, in Paul Bailey's *For This My Glory* (128-33), pivotally, in Ruth Louise Partridge's little-known but impressive historical novel, *Other Drums*, in which Joseph alludes to the First Vision, while confessing to Nancy Rigdon that he had plunged into wild currants. "I opened the sluices myself in a wood when I asked wisdom of God as my Bible advised me." He adds, sagely, "Never pray to God for enlightenment, Sister Nancy, unless you are prepared to take the consequences" (271-72).

Most writers of modern fiction who venture to employ the First Vision in their stories generally do so in order to ground their tales in historical and spiritual Mormonism. And, again, the vision becomes a touchstone for the characters' faith in Mormonism. Typical of such use of Joseph and the First Vision is Maurine Whipple's introduction of the First Vision into Erastus Snow's ritual catechizing of St. George Saints in their "Sunday evening sing-and-story tell," which begins with Snow's query, "All those here . . . hold up their hands . . . who saw and knew . . . the Prophet Joseph!" After Sister Eardley's testimony that, "The Prophet Joseph . . . warn't like no ordinary man. There allus seemed to be a light somewheres inside of him--like a candle behind his eyes . . .," Snow catechizes, "How old was Joseph when he had his first vision?":

A man's reply this time: "He was fifteen, and it was 1820, the year of the great religious revival, and he read in the first chapter of James.

. . . ."

"Where was this? . . . ."

"Manchester, New York--Joseph retired to the sacred grove and kneeled down. . . ."

The old, old story, but Clory was suddenly feeling the "thick darkness that gathered around" and hearing the voice from out the blinding light: "This is my beloved Son, Hear Him. . . ." "They draw near me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (70). And so on through the oral recitation of a people who find unity and common purpose in their recitations of the trials and mobbings and expulsions and martyrdoms and uprootings and exoduses and settlings of the nascent church.--all centered in and about the First Vision.

As with most early and many late poetic treatments of the vision, most of the fictional renderings of the First Vision are made for didactic and inspirational purposes, for proclaiming and establishing the truth of the restoration as exemplified in the vision. Two contemporary LDS writers of fiction, Cecilia Jensen and Gerald N. Lund, have woven Joseph Smith's 1838 account almost literally into their novels. Jensen, in her carefully researched and well-written novel, *Joseph in Palmyra*, utilizes Joseph's recounting exactly but enhances her account by adding a plethora of historical and anthropological detail gleaned from recent scholarship. As with most fictional treatments of the event, Jensen does not follow Joseph into the grove; instead, she follows him to the Reverend Lane's revival, where Joseph concludes to pray. On the evening following the vision, Joseph decides to tell his family, and it is through this recounting of the event that the reader learns the details of the vision:

"Father . . . ." Joseph looked from one to the other parent. "Mother. . . . This morning I saw the Father and the Son. The living God and his Son, Jesus Christ. They appeared to me." From the utter silence he gathered that no one comprehended what he was telling them.

. . . "Perhaps it would be better to start at the beginning."

Joseph then recounts his spiritual struggles, his visit to the Dr. Lane's revival meeting, his determination to pray for wisdom, his visit to the grove, the presence of evil, and his calling on God for deliverance. Joseph continues:

Again he paused, almost oblivious to those around him as he recalled the sudden glory of his release from the darkness. "At that moment," he continued softly, "I saw light above me: a pillar of light

exactly over my head, brighter than the sun. At that moment I found myself released from that awful power."

No one spoke. In the intense silence, he went on. "As the light drew nearer, the brightness increased. And when it reached the treetops the whole area came alive with light. I expected the leaves and boughs to just burn up. But when this did not happen, I thought I would be all right. Descending slowly, the light rested on me."

He paused, wishing he had words to describe the experience. Then he continued. "It produced a peculiar sensation throughout my whole body. Immediately my mind was caught away from the natural objects about me. I was caught up in a heavenly vision and saw two glorious personages, who looked exactly like each other. . . . One called my name, and then pointed to the other, and said, 'This is my beloved Son. Hear him.'"

. . . . In the shadowy candlelight, Joseph saw the awe in their faces. (8-11, 18-22)

In a technique reminiscent of Cecilia Jensen's, Gerald N. Lund, in *Pillar of Light*, Volume 1 in his landmark saga of the restoration, *The Work and the Glory*, has Joseph recount the First Vision in words lifted from Joseph's 1838 account--a technique which troubles Eugene England in his *This People* review of the book, but which immediately placates the majority of readers, who would be as unlikely to tolerate another rendering of Joseph's vision as Christians would be to suffer any linguistic liberties with, say, Christ's words, "Peace, be still," "Into thy hands I commend my spirit," or "It is finished."

In *Pillar of Light*, Lund's Joseph Smith tells the story of his First Vision to Nathan Steed, characterizing himself in the conversation but, more importantly for Lund's prefaced purpose, characterizing young Nathan Steed, and eventually each member of the Steed family, through their various responses to Joseph's theophany. Lund's purpose is to lead readers to confront the question, "How would I have responded to Joseph Smith, if he had told me he had seen a vision?"

Joseph begins his relation by telling the young man, "I'll not ask you to believe what I'm about to tell you, Nathan," and describes the camp-meeting fervor in their neighborhood in 1820, his reading of James 1, and his determination to ask God which church he should join:

"And?" Nathan pressed.

"By now it was early in the spring of 1820. . . . It was a beautiful clear morning. I went into the woods, and making sure I was alone, I immediately knelt down to pray. . . . To my amazement, I found I couldn't

utter a word. It was as though my tongue was swollen in my head."

Nathan blinked. This was not what he had expected to hear.

"Suddenly I thought I heard footsteps behind me, someone walking towards me in the dry leaves. I was startled. I whipped around." Now at last he looked up, directly into Nathan's eyes. "No one was there."

Nathan felt a sudden chill run up and down his spine. . . .

After describing the onslaught of the powers of darkness, Joseph continues:

"At the very moment of my deepest despair, as I was about to abandon myself to destruction, at that precise moment, I saw a pillar of light."

Nathan's head snapped up.

Joseph went on steadily now, speaking slowly but with great earnestness. "It was exactly over my head. It was far brighter than the sun at noonday. The light was so intense I thought the very leaves would burst into flame. It descended gradually until it fell upon me. Instantly, the moment the light touched me, I was delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me, I saw two personages--" He stopped, noting the expression on Nathan's face. "I saw two personages," he continued firmly, "whose glory and brightness defy all description. They were standing above me in the air."

Now it was Nathan who involuntarily passed a hand across his eyes. A pillar of light! Two personages?

"The one spoke," Joseph continued, softly now, and more slowly, as though giving Nathan time to digest the words. "He called me by name. 'Joseph,' he said, 'this is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!'"

He stopped, watching Nathan closely.

Nathan's mind was reeling. "Are you saying . . ." He faltered, overwhelmed. "You mean you saw . . ." He could not bring himself to say it.

Joseph nodded with the utmost solemnity. "I saw God and I saw his Son, Jesus Christ." He sighed, suddenly weary. "I know how that must sound to you. But I say again, Nathan, and I say it with all the power of my soul: I saw the Father and I saw his Son."

. . . Nathan leaned back, totally astonished. He could only nod.

Lund then turns Joseph into the teacher leading Nathan through the received standard LDS lessons to be gained from the vision:

"What did God look like?" Nathan's voice was barely a whisper. "I mean, was he a--" He stopped, groping for an adequate word.

"A person?"

"Yes."

"Yes, Nathan. Most assuredly yes, though a personage of glory and majesty beyond belief. But yes, Nathan, God is a person. When he said he created man in his own image, I know now what he meant. He looks like us--" He shook it off. "No, we look like him! He is a person. He is our Father. . . . " He stopped. In the distance a meadowlark was calling out its last evening song. The breeze was picking up now, making a soft rustling noise as it danced across the meadow. The stream gurgled cheerfully as it ran past them. But Nathan was aware of none of this. His mind was a wild tumble of thoughts and emotions. (52-60)

Lund, better than anyone to date, has, without doing violence to the reader's respect for the Prophet Joseph, skillfully brought the historical and revered Joseph into conversation with a fictitious and believable Nathan, who vicariously serves in the reader's stead (thus Steed?), and melded canonical text with imagined conversation and Nathan's imagined responses to quicken a familiar text with personal meaning. I believe that Lund, in *Pillar of Light* and in the four volumes which have followed, has done a credible job of unshackling himself from the chains of historical tyranny, articulating and reifying the First Vision and other early events of the Restoration for another *fin de siècle* generation. Through his imaginative yet orthodox revitalizing of the Prophet, "millions shall know 'Brother Joseph' again."

## V

Although Vardis Fisher, in *Children of God* (1938), faithfully follows Joseph's sequence in recounting the First Vision, his essentially poetical handling of the vision renders a fresh interpretation of the vision and leads us to consideration of recent uses of the vision as literary points of departure, as treatments which open to readers new and different meanings of the experience, meanings which incorporate not only the Church but the individual. Fisher leads us to an passionate Joseph, who is almost astonished to find himself

. . . kneeling here in leaf-depth, and speaking in impassioned wonder to a great blue pasture with its solitary golden sun. After a little, he knew there were tears in his eyes and tears wet and running on his cheeks as the whole world listened to the anxious humble asking of his voice. . . ." (392)

Then the vision bursts upon him:

He saw first an intimation of brightness far out in the universe; it grew like the softness of morning, like a gentle flowering out of utter darkness, as if heaven were overflowing the wastelands of night as brilliance spilled from God's robe as He walked. For a long moment the light spread and gathered strength and then suddenly fell downward in a broad beam of terrible splendor, in a great and blinding pillar that touched the earth and lay far out in a white column of eternity. Then, with startling swiftness, two persons appeared in this stupendous shaft of light, the Father and the Son; and they were exactly alike in countenance and in the incandescence of their glory. They walked down the beam as down a highway of light; and one called the prostrate lad by name and pointed to his companion and said, "This is my beloved Son. Hear Him!" The Son spoke. He declared in the voice of a great organ that all the creeds of earth were an abomination in His sight. . . . The voice died away in echoes that rolled in solemn music, and the highway of light slowly faded, with Father and Son standing as vanishing silhouettes against the infinite. The light closed like a shutter to a thin wraith of holiness and slowly withdrew to the lone glittering point of a star. (392-93)

Vardis Fisher's poetic liberties with the First Vision prefigure the tendency, quickened in recent years, to extend, far beyond Fisher's tentative poetic soarings, the symbolic universal and mythic qualities inherent in the First Vision; to loosen the tight grip of the historical boundaries and probe the Sacred Grove experience for universal meanings other than suggested in traditional uses of the vision; to see in the vision the pattern of individual steps toward conversion, the pattern of God's relationship with human beings--the democratizing and universalizing of the experience; the likening "of the scriptures unto us," as Nephi counsels, ". . . for our profit and learning" (1 Ne. 19:23); the enabling, as illuminated by the First Vision, of each man and woman to enter his or her own Sacred Grove, to gain that "testimony of Jesus, which is," says John in Revelation, "the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10).

Poetry enables Allie Howe, for example, to celebrate the First Vision by melding the event with nature in poetic association, with nature playing the role of harbinger:

A wisp of the new morning  
Washes across his face  
And turns him  
To wooded temples,

Where,  
Ancient in days, the awakening mother  
Lifts

Against his suppliant knees;  
And a breath above,  
Reigning all the space around,  
The Holiest of Holies  
Unveil

And Joseph sups from Their Presence . . .

Robert P. Tristram Coffin, who published his poem, "The Mormons," in 1939, was in the vanguard of those who treat the First Vision as a symbolic entry to other meanings. In the "Mormonism is over" impulse of literature of the 1930s made popular by the "Lost Generation" of Mormon writers, Coffin, not a Mormon, symbolizes the vision as the invigorating force of Mormonism, a force continued in Brigham Young but dissolving as the Saints settle into staid and visionless materialism:

Joseph Smith, when he was young,  
Saw a golden censer swung,

In the sunset saw two wings  
Full of eyes and shining things.

Among the pumpkins in a field  
He found a great book, seven-sealed.

Treading furrows Joseph trod  
Walked a twilit, comely god. . . .

But,

. . . the new age caught them up.  
Stilled the psaltery, drained the cup

Mormon's wings grew heavy lead,  
And he sank his graying head. . . .

All the million eyes grew dim  
With the age that crept on him.

Gone the tents and wives and pride,  
And the youngest god had died.

Latter-day Saint poets have also begun, in recent years, to wax imaginative in using the First Vision as point of departure, infusing their poems with the visionary spirit, and probing for implications of Joseph's experience in individual lives. Bruce Wayne Jorgensen, in "The Light Come Down," extends the borders of the First Vision by shrinking the canvas. In his striking poem, Jorgensen first re-tells the vision as folk-ballad:

Just a dusty country boy



Praying in the trees,  
Knocked out flat and speechless,  
Again upon on his knees  
    And the light come down,  
    Lord, the light come down.

Sharper than suns he sweated in,  
It slapped that April mud,  
It withered the one that threatened him  
And stunned him where he stood.  
    Yes, the light come down,  
    Lord, it did come down.

And he was just fourteen,  
Mixed up, and read your book  
And took you at your word  
and asked--and Lord,  
    You let the light come down,  
    O Lord, a-comin down.

Then, placing Joseph and his vision in the larger context of God's dealings with his mortal children, Jorgensen continues:

Old Adam had a farmer's son  
And Abraham did too--  
All made of mud but you made em good  
And brought em home to you,  
    For the light come down,  
    It always did come down.

The poet then urges the Lord to

. . . look down on country boys  
That stink and puzzle and pray,  
And strike the light to blind their sight  
And make their night your day.

Finally, connecting the First Vision to the lives of all of God's children who seek light, Jorgensen concludes,

And bless you, Lord, for country boys,  
Each hungry mother's son  
Treading the furrow his father plowed  
Just like your single son  
    When you and him come down,  
    When you the light come down.

Perhaps the most imaginative and complex poetic rendering of the First Vision is found in Emma Lou Thayne's three-part pantoum, "Meditations on the Heaven":

Angel wings are on the beach  
I found one shining in the sand  
One late night looking for the comet  
We'd been told would be near Pleiades.

Thayne transforms the "ancient icon [of angel wings] like the comet's head" into a "celestial body grounded for our view," which becomes, in turn, an icon representing the light of Joseph Smith's First Vision and containing the repetition of lines characteristic of the pantoum:

Suppose he really saw the vision, God, the angel  
My church owns the story: Joseph in the grove, fourteen.  
A supernatural sight of extraordinary beauty and  
significance  
While praying for a truth that had eluded others.

My church owns the story: Joseph in the grove, fourteen.  
Not unlike Joan, young Buddha, or Mohammed  
While praying for a truth that had eluded others  
From unusual encounter the gift more than surprising

It had to be believed, the unbelievable

Suppose he really saw the vision, God, the angel  
More than white on black that no one else could see  
A supernatural sight of extraordinary beauty and  
significance.

In section three, "The Comet Is Remembering," Thayne fuses the comet, the First Vision, and her own girlhood memories of a chapel painting of the Sacred Grove to describe the First Vision, which burns with layered density at center of her being, more real than reality:

Not until today this small comet in my scalp:  
The clattering of memory; the painting  
In the chapel of my childhood against the organ loft:  
Joseph kneeling at the elevated feet of the Father and  
the Son.

. . . it rose indigenous as music.  
Did the artist put it in--the vision--or did I?  
In the Sacred Grove, sun streaming on the boy at prayer.

More real now than the Sacred Grove I occupied one grown-  
up Sunday  
Not until today this small comet in my scalp:  
Indelible on knowing, like the features of a mother  
giving milk:  
In the chapel of my childhood against the organ loft:

the vision.

## VI

While playwrights such as Susan Elizabeth Howe, in her *Burdens of Earth*, and Clinton F. Larson in *The Mantle of the Prophet*, do not recreate the First Vision, their vision is informed by the dramatic visionary patterns set in motion in the Sacred Grove and replicated in the lives of Joseph's followers, who can say, with Brigham Young, in *The Mantle of the Prophet*, on receiving Joseph's actual and spiritual mantles,

Joseph, I feel your ghost, and you have delivered me  
Over the veil into the velvet plains. . . .  
Before me the people feel the breath of your being:

. . .  
And they weep for the mission before us  
And the scroll of the covenants you wrote upon. . . .  
Joseph, . . .

. . . you are with me in the mission  
You brought me to, that I cannot deny. (44-45)

This same mantic/spiritual quality, this visionary template overlaid on mortal dailinesses, informs much of contemporary Mormon fiction, as it should. Wherever one looks in contemporary Mormon fiction, one finds, at the crux of these fictions, the expectation and reality of supernal intervention which replicates the pattern initiated in Joseph's First Vision. Regardless of the location of the heart of modern Mormon fiction, many writers draw near to Joseph's pattern with their lips--whether it be in the comical appearances of angel-in-the-rough Moroni Skinner to his backsliding grandson, in Samuel W. Taylor's *Heaven Knows Why* (1948); in Amy's "say-so or sense?" dream or her end-of-book vision of her husband, in Eileen G. Kump's *Bread and Milk* (1979); or in Nephi Nicholes's visionary dreams of his future wife, Eleña, in Jerry M. Young's book of the same name (1992); or in Julie's discomfitting apotheosis in Margaret Blair Young's *Salvador* (1992); or in the visions of several of Levi S. Peterson's characters, from Paul's vision in (not on) "Road to Damascus," and Arabella's vision of the face of God in "Canyons of Grace," to the all-too-real and scratchy presence of the otherworldly in "The Third Nephite," and Frank's anti-type vision of the Cowboy Jesus, in *Backslider* (1986). Mormon fiction is informed by the First--and subsequent--visions; they characterize seeing the world Mormonly.

Orson Scott Card, modern Mormonism's most prolific fictionist, embodies and illustrates the concept. Card's *Lost Boys* (1992), his first so-called "mainstream" novel, is centered--or concluded--in supernal realities. In his still-in-progress *The Tales of Alvin Maker* series, Card transforms the whole religion-engendering story of Joseph Smith into a fantasy world driven by magic and folklore, as Alvin Miller, Jr., seventh son and Maker and thus a destined

adversary of the Unmaker, experiences an initiating vision in which he sees the Shining Man standing at the foot of his bed. In *Red Prophet* we learn a rational explanation of the vision from the Shaw-Nee Indian Prophet, Lolla-Wossiky, but only after the apparent vision has launched Alvin into a number of remarkable revelations and white-magic miracles. In a related kind of imaginative soaring, Card is also busy transforming 1 Nephi into parallel world fantasy, in his *Memories of Earth* series, featuring Nepi and his brothers and father--and, more importantly, the powerful matriarch.

The First Vision is likewise obliquely important in Card's historical novel, *Saints*. Dinah Kirkham Handy Smith, an English convert to Mormonism and later teacher of the Smith children and plural wife to Joseph, undergoes her own first vision as Elder Heber C. Kimball preaches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, opening to Dinah a vision of the face of God, "the perfect man." The face is that of Joseph Smith: "It was to this person that she spoke, he was the one who heard her." While undressing for bed later that night, Dinah is swept into a sensual vision of the face of Joseph:

Dinah stood on the brink of creation; below her God was first putting form to the world, and she was watching. She was part of it. . . . The room was already so full of him that it would burst, and as she spoke silently she reached out her hands to touch him.

Minutes later, after making love with her husband Matthew, and thus vicariously with Joseph, Dinah returns to her vision, which is a point of departure from Joseph's First Vision, which Elder Kimball had just related to her:

Father, she said softly. Father, Father, Father. She was a young farmboy lying on a bed in his father's house in America, longing for something, knowing it would not come, expecting it to arrive any moment.

The feeling grew and grew until she could not bear it. The light also grew within her, until at last she could see it, a whiteness reaching from her to fill the room. She heard her words become audible, and she finally realized that her angel would not come and stand outside her in the air, that the angel would be within her, and her own lips would speak the message she was meant to hear. "I love you," said her lips, and only her own ears heard. . . . And then the whiteness grew too bright and she closed her eyes and almost immediately felt herself drift toward sleep, . . . and she heard her own voice fall silent and the other voice at last speak in answer, speak from those perfect lips only one thing: "I am," said the voice [of Joseph]; . . . sleeping but feeling herself awake forever, the sun and moon and stars all within her body, the leaves of the trees so large that she could stand between them and watch them grow to infinity that she could touch the stars that dwelt within

them, too. "I am," said the voice. So slowly. And Dinah answered, silently, "I know."

## VII

In 1847, three years after the death of Joseph Smith, Jr., at Carthage, Illinois, John Greenleaf Whittier wrote, after attending a Mormon service in Lowell, Massachusetts:

Once in the world's history we were to have a Yankee prophet, and we have had him in Joe Smith. For good or for evil, he has left his track on the great pathway of life; [and] "knocked out for himself a window in the wall of the nineteenth century," whence his rude, bold, good-humored face will peer out upon the generations to come.

While Joseph Smith, Jr. continues to "peer out" at millions through the window of his First Vision, the First Vision enables millions to peer back at Joseph as the prophet of God. And while his recounting of that event in the Sacred Grove remains the center pillar of Mormonism, it has taken on ever more personal and mythic dimensions. Joseph's narrative and the increasing number of literary renderings of that narrative suggest individual patterns for seeking personal revelation from God--a spiritual dynamic important to the Latter-day Saint who seeks, through the ministry of the Holy Ghost, a personal witness and "testimony" of God's purposes for him- or herself in mortality. Thus the First Vision and its various treatments in Mormon letters enable individual Latter-day Saints to soar on eagle wings of words and images to individual illumination, faith, and testimony. The First Vision, as recorded by Joseph and applied by writers of poetry, drama, and fiction, enables individual believers to come to "know thee the only true and living God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3), while assuring that, as the Saints sing in the hymn "Praise to the Man," "millions shall know 'Brother Joseph' again."

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## GHOSTS AND OUTSIDERS:

### MORMON WRITERS PLAYING IN THE DARK

*Eugene England\**

Nobel Laureate Tony Morrison, in *Playing in the Dark*, argues that critics and teachers of American literature have ignored the effects on white writers of the racialism at the heart of our national identity--and thus have missed much of the complexity and richness of even our classic canon. Her work has moved me to consider if the racialism at the heart of Mormon identity has added to the complexity and richness of Mormon literature.

Morrison claims to be engaged not in another attack on racism but in a neglected task of understanding and appreciation: "In a wholly racialized society, there is no escape from racially inflected language, and the work writers do to unhobble the imagination from the demands of that language is complicated, interesting, and definitive" (13). By a "racialized" society (as opposed to racist) Morrison simply means to evoke the historical fact that, from the very beginning, a large number of black bodies, together with the social, economic, intellectual, and theological constructs and contradictions surrounding slavery and segregation, have been a central presence, both literally and imaginatively, in the American experience. She reviews how early Americans expressed the meanings and emotions associated with their new ideals of individuality and freedom and innocence through contrast with the condition and identity of black slaves. She reminds us that this black presence has existed "in every one of this nation's mightiest struggles" (65): a subtext of exclusion in the Declaration of Independence and Constitution; the focus of our most destructive and divisive violence, the Civil War; a major referent in the battles over enfranchisement of women, over the development of a free and open public school system, over balanced representation in legislatures, and over definitions of basic justice; and a central influence on theological discourse.

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Such a subtext has much to do with haunting guilt and denial, of course, and is exactly what we might expect in any culture--or individual--whose identity is founded on a fundamental contradiction between its professed ideals and its actual practices and attitudes, one that makes inevitable a great struggle both in public discourse and activity and in private conscience, one that all writers will be affected by, and one that the good writers make into fine literature.

Morrison looks first at Willa Cather's last novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940), which she claims has been ignored with a "willful critical blindness" (18) because of its ultimately unsuccessful but "valiant" and "honest" effort to engage "the power and license" of a white slave mistress, Sapphira, who in irrational jealousy concerning her husband, tries to sacrifice sexually one of her female slaves. Morrison concludes that Cather "works out and toward the meaning of female betrayal as it faces the void of racism. She may not have arrived safely . . . but to her credit she did undertake the dangerous journey" (28).

Morrison also shows how Edgar Allan Poe, in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1857), describes the end of another dangerous journey, when, after the death of a black native, Nu-Nu, the boat carrying Pym and Peters, moves on until a shrouded giant arises before them with skin "of the perfect whiteness of snow" and then--nothing. The narrative quickly ends. This is only the first (we can think, of course, of Melville's *Moby Dick*) of "figurations of impenetrable whiteness that surface in American literature whenever an Africanist presence is engaged" and give "a strong suggestion of paralysis and incoherence; of impasse and non-sequitur. . . . [They] seem to function as both antidote for and meditation on the shadow that is companion to this whiteness--a dark and abiding presence that moves the hearts and texts of American literature with fear and longing" (33).

Finally, Morrison explores Hemingway's use, in *To Have and to Have Not* (1937), of a silent, nameless, sexless, nationless, cowardly, and irresponsible "nigger" as a foil for the virile American Harry Morgan. The Africanist presence is made serviceable to win admiration for Harry and later, through another black man, whom Harry slaps for an assumed insult to his wife--and then her obsessive and sexually encoded talk about having her hair bleached, to contextualize an enhanced erotic attraction between these whites that is linked to color. In Hemingway's posthumously published *The Garden of Eden* (1986), a woman both bleaches her hair and tans her body toward blackness, as the author explores what Morrison calls a "predatory, devouring eroticism" and a fearful, attractive strangeness, pulled "from fields of desire and need" (90) that are aroused by a haunting but unacknowledged black presence. But again, Morrison's project is not to condemn Hemingway but to examine how both stories "are enabled by the discursive Africanism at the author's disposal" and to remind us that both "readers and writers are bereft when criticism remains too polite or too fearful to notice a disruptive darkness before its eyes" (91).

Let's try, then, to look clearly at the disruptive darkness in Mormon experience and Mormon literature. The great majority of Mormons, until quite recently, were part of a nation with a large physical and mythical Africanist presence and an inherited slave and segregationist ideology that produced haunting distortions and contradictions of the kind Morrison finds in classic American literature. But in addition, although there were very few black Mormons until the 1960s, our own founding documents and early history, as well as our continuing theological discourse and ways of thinking about other crucial issues, such as the role of women and the nature of God, is full of haunting contradictions and distortions connected to blackness.

Our founding text, the Book of Mormon, states clearly that blacks and whites are "all . . . alike unto God" (2 Ne. 26:33); it records in Alma 3 that "white" Amlicites could become subject to the curse placed on the Lamanites merely by joining them and marking themselves with red in the forehead; and it claims that thus "they brought upon themselves the curse; and even so doth every man that is cursed bring upon himself his own condemnation" (Alma 3:19). Yet the Book of Mormon also clearly states that the Lamanites were cursed by God with a dark skin to make them less attractive marriage partners to the Nephites, implies that the curse was genetic and inherited, and claims that as Lamanites became more righteous they would (and at times did) become more "white and delightsome" (2 Ne. 30:6). Joseph Smith, far in advance of his time, welcomed blacks fully into the Church, ordained some to the priesthood, opposed slavery, and from the evidence in early hymns and First Presidency statements clearly intended for blacks, together with all races, to be actively proselyted and converted and to participate fully in the temple ordinances at both Kirtland and Nauvoo.<sup>1</sup> Yet, soon after his death (and perhaps before), a policy was instituted which continued for nearly 140 years not to give other blacks the priesthood or accept them in the temple, not even actively to take the gospel to them. Utah came into the Union as a slave territory, the hymns of equality were removed or changed, and blacks were described in Mormon writings published up to the present as an entirely separate and degenerate race, inferior intellectually and morally, and even cursed by some error in the preexistence (which they cannot know about and therefore can never repent of) so that they come color-coded into this world, marked by God for all to see as destined to lesser opportunities and blessings.

Therefore, Mormon writers have borne a double burden of hidden black presence and denial, of fundamental contradiction between

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<sup>1</sup>See Lester E. Bush, Jr., "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 8 (Summer 1973) and reprinted in *Neither White nor Black: Mormon Scholars Confront the Race Issue in a Universal Church*, eds. Lester E. Bush, Jr. and Armand Mauss (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1984). See esp. p. 61.

professed ideals and actual practices: We have all the American struggle that Morrison reviews and in addition our own cultural overlay which has been both more idealistic and in some ways more racialized than the rest of American culture. We were one of only a very few churches to institutionalize a distinction by race and were unique in developing a powerfully influential, though unofficial, racialized theology based in our doctrine of a preexistence. We had our minstrel shows and lynchings in pioneer times, a Coon Chicken Inn in Salt Lake that, down into the fifties, invited us to enter for our fried chicken through the grinning mouth of a caricature of a black man's head, and we excluded blacks from the Church-owned Hotel Utah. Utah Mormon legislatures down into the sixties were among those in the nation most in favor of stringent laws against interracial marriage and against fair housing laws.

Have Mormon writers, then, as Morrison claims the best in the American canon have, "taken responsibility for all of the values we bring to our art"? Have we, like Cather, however mixed the results, had the courage to take the journey into our contradictory, racialized, cultural past and present? Actually a few have--for me a disappointingly small number, but with excellent results. What we have so far is largely what Morrison calls "underscored omissions"--a deafening absence. I have found only five examples, but fortunately all of them are excellent achievements, and they come in a wide variety of genres.

Sorensen's "The Ghost" first appeared in her collection *Where Nothing Is Long Ago: Memoirs of a Utah Childhood* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1963). She begins this "memoir" with an indirect reference to Mormon racialism, "Because I lived in Manti from the time I was five, . . . I never saw a Negro until I was ten" (113). She tells, from the child's perspective, of her first train ride, on which she meets a black porter, admires his "powerful, deep voice" and "white teeth," his "rosy palms and his marvelous, long fingers" and shows how, "smitten forever by the joy of travel," she lets that feeling encourage an easy curiosity about and acceptance of blacks. A few weeks later she is surprised to find, when she goes to church back in Manti, a black man sitting alone at the back of the chapel, one who like the porter responds to her hello in a "big, bass voice," which he also lets boom out during hymns and song practice--to the especial delight of the song leader, Brother Johnson.

Virginia learns from Carol, her best friend and the bishop's daughter, that the man (who remains nameless throughout the story) had met, in Tennessee, a missionary from the ward, Mark Peterson, who had invited him to stop by and enjoy the Utah fishing. He and his family have indeed come by, in an old truck, and pitch their tent for awhile on the Peterson property and then move up the canyon.

Meanwhile Sorensen is able to explore from a naive child's point of view the confused Mormon history and popular theology concerning blacks. She comments to Carol, "Maybe he wants to come to Utah and join the Church and get to be 'white and delightful,'"

overcome disease and poverty, could have understood the blacks' longing for the promised land to be "both economic and prophetic" (78). Because most of the workers can't see this, are "unwilling to love the spiritual life with [the blacks], unable to pray with them," and because some get involved in sex with local blacks, the project shuts down prematurely and Keller goes home. But he bears his testimony of what he learned: "One sure place the Kingdom of God militant can be found in our world is in the social battle-fronts: in the radical urgency of social welfare work, in the radical urgency of civil rights marches and picket lines, in the radical urgency of passive protest against malignant politics" (73). Someday he will "turn again--and it doesn't have to be to Tennessee, but maybe to a local neighborhood or to Another Country--to lose myself among the trapped or degenerate. How else am I to find what I in this world must find--myself? Every Soul has its own South. Especially a Mormon's" (79).

Clifton Jolley's poem, "Mr. Bojangles," published in *Dialogue* in the spring of 1974, just four years before the revelation giving blacks the priesthood and when internal and external tension was near its peak, is mainly a cry of shame and guilt:

Bojangles so much burdens me  
With his memory  
That I am often caught, mid syllable  
As he stitches back the grey fields of my brain--  
Hems my seldom freedom  
With the snipping clip and canter  
Of his heels  
And toe-down spin that pins me to his pain. (76)

Mr. Bojangles is an American figure, the black stereotype who, as Jolley reminds us, played butlers and fools in dozens of flickering films and tap-danced at hundreds of county fairs. But Jolley makes Mormons think of pioneer minstrels and the Coon Chicken Inn and quotes an anonymous Everyman Mormon from Provo: "I read in the *Daily Herald* / That some negras east of here / Went wild and killed . . .", a vicious racist rumor of the kind that many of us heard versions of in Utah in the sixties. Jolley ends with mordant puns which evoke both the continuing soul-destroying costs of racialism and the tentative hope for change: "Shirley Temple has grown from plump to fat, / And old Bojangles, / Sole worn through behind the tap, / From black to Black."

Of all Mormon authors to this point, Orson Scott Card deals most thoroughly, though indirectly, most affirmatively and yet perhaps most hauntingly, with the black presence in Mormon American experience. His Alvin Maker series of novels reimagines Joseph Smith as a frontier folk magician learning to be a prophet. In *Prentice Alvin*, the third novel, a black baby, Arthur Stuart, whose mother gave her life to bring him out of slavery, becomes central to the quests of both Alvin and Peggy (the figures parallel to Joseph and Emma) and allows Card to explore probably the worst horror of slavery--the sexual use of slave women by their owners

and the selling of the resulting children away from their mothers--but also to create intensely moving scenes of sacrificial love by blacks and of reconciliation and new relationship with whites, especially between Alvin and Arthur.

Card creates as a subtext the guilt over centuries of white sexual misuse of blacks that probably undergirds white fantasies about black sexual prowess and sexual threat to whites--including whites' irrational horror about miscegenation, which Mormons have picked up and emphasized down into our time. With tortured scriptural interpretations and specious reasoning that parodies the American slaver's theology, a Southern slave owner, Cavil Planter, convinces himself he is called by God to father as many children on his slaves as he can and to spread them throughout the South to reduce the amount of evil black blood. Card thus also parodies the process by which some Mormons later adopted and expanded the slavers' theology, with help from modern scriptures like the Book of Abraham. Card's slaver even invents a racist God to command his actions and excuse his lust, one who says to him, "You see the face that you invented for me in your own mind, the body conjured out of your own imagination" (8).

This is, of course, Card's serious parody of the process by which the Mormon concept of God has been corrupted in the attempts to rationalize the denial of priesthood to blacks--the defining of God as a racist who affirms white innocence over against black sinfulness from the preexistence. Card thus deconstructs for his Mormon readers the influential work of Mormon theologians who have, throughout our history, combined then-current racialized myths with Mormon resources, first to make totally specious scriptural connections between Cain and Canaanites and Ham and black Egyptians and the preexistence and modern blacks--in order to provide a rationale for exclusion of blacks from the priesthood that would blame them rather than whites.<sup>2</sup>

But Card also provides a positive model for Mormon attitudes and behavior by making the Joseph and Emma Smith figures models of unracialized Christian openness, even sacrificial love. Peggy risks much by insisting on tutoring Arthur Stuart privately when the town fathers won't let him attend schools with the white children, and he becomes Alvin's constant companion and apprentice, appearing thus on the book's cover, the first black face on a work of Mormon fiction. Gradually Arthur develops his own spiritual gift of perfect hearing and recall of voices, including God's.

A supreme symbolic connection is made when Alvin uses his own gifts to save Arthur from the finders who come from the South, tracking Arthur with their knack of perfect recognition of his biological "signature," based on a hair or skin sample. In an

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<sup>2</sup>The two most popular examples are John Lund, *The Church and the Negro: A Discussion of Mormons, Negroes, and the Priesthood* (Salt Lake City: Paramount, 1967 and 1970), and John J. Stewart, *Mormonism and the Negro* (Orem, UT: Bookmark, 1960, 1964, and 1967); reprinted Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 1978).

unmistakable parallel to Mormon baptism and temple rituals, Alvin, standing with Arthur in the Hio River, uses his own gift to search inside Arthur to find that "signature" (obviously something like DNA)--and, using his sense of a "string" that "connects" them, "heart to heart . . . breast to breast," he changes Arthur's DNA to be more like his own: "Just a little. But even a little meant that Arthur Stuart had stopped being completely himself and started being partly Alvin. It seemed to Alvin that what he was doing was terrible and wonderful at the same time." And what he is doing, he realizes, is crucial to the last stage of his apprenticeship--which is to be a Maker of humans. He remembers something that Arthur Stuart had heard and repeated perfectly, from a redbird that is clearly the Holy Ghost: "The Maker is the one who is part of what he Makes" (288).

Margaret Blair Young's autobiographical short story, "Outsiders," which was published in *Dialogue* in 1991, starts off, like Sorensen's, with a frank confession of Mormon racialism: "My friend Junie and I were Utah Mormons. We knew no blacks till we were teenagers" (295). Her linguist father is hired one summer at Alta, Utah, to train Peace Corps volunteers, including some blacks, who are going to Brazil. Young moves quickly into her subtext by focusing the protagonist's attention on one of the posters about Brazil that decorate the lodge: "In the cafeteria was a huge image of the Cristo--Jesus beckoning, arms outstretched against the seas, unrecovered from crucifixion. 'Come on in,' he seemed to say. 'To my arms. To Brazil.' The picture took up half the wall."

But what takes up the young woman's main attention, though she works in the cafeteria under the poster, is her developing, confused sexuality, which becomes a parallel and bridge to the narrator's confusion about race, especially Mormon racialism. The story is a brilliant example of a brave confrontation with the mixed fear and desire concerning racialized sex that Morrison finds in Cather and Hemingway. The two young women put a glass to the wall and listen to a black couple next door making love: "Once I said, 'Icky!' loud enough that Junie clapped her hand over my mouth and whispered, 'Shut up!' The black man had put a sign on their door, which is the only Portuguese phrase I've retained: 'Terra de nunca nunca.' Never Never Land" (297).

The narrator prepares us for the dénouement by reporting a conversation between her father (whom she tells us she worships as her "revered commander, my gentle omniscient patriarch") and David Marx, one of the volunteers, a "gentle, bearded intellectual with wire-rimmed glasses," who objects to "this business of not letting blacks into . . . Mormon temples. . . . You let them join, but not go to your shrines. It's sort of like not consummating a marriage, isn't it?" David talks about "the alleged curse of Cain," but he speaks softly and so does her Dad: "There was love and resistance in their arguing" (297).

But some weeks later, blackness ruptures this white politeness. As the narrator and her father have dinner with David and Junie and the black couple, there is a tender scene in which the black man, Adam, talks about his Baptist preacher father. Then his

wife Giselle makes a sudden transition to tell them of going to Temple Square and the tenderness departs: "'You shoulda seen the looks we got. I could almost hear the Mormon people locking doors on us. Click. Click.'" Adam says to the narrator's father: "'Must be hard on you. . . Cause I know--I KNOW--you can't think it's right to keep up walls like that. You can't feel good about a church that locks its doors to someone'" (302).

Finally, in a scene like those many of us experienced in the 1960s and 1970s, a painful mythic story we are still trapped in, the father explains, "We let blacks join the church, it was just the priesthood they couldn't have, just the temple they couldn't enter." And when Adam says, "'But you can't support that policy,' . . . Dad sat up very straight. His eyes were full of compassion but deadly serious too. You didn't question my father's faith. 'I support that policy,' he said" (303).

The scene intensifies in pain as Adam asks, "'Why do you hate my people . . . Who do you think God is? . . . some maitre-d of some club?'" When the father protests, "'If it were my church--'" Adam says, "'It is your church.'" When the father says, no, it's God's church and he has "'for some unseen reason ordained this trial of faith,'" Adam mimics, "'Trial of your faith. . . Your faith, hell, man, you're IN.'" And when the father talks of being a missionary in Brazil and having black converts whom he loved, "'loved like my kids. Do you know how that felt to tell them--'" Adam interrupts, "'How it felt! You're asking me if I know how it felt? Let me ask you, Mister Sir, what do you know about how it feels?' He stood. 'You never been a slave,' he whispered, then shouted it for the whole cafeteria to hear; 'YOU NEVER BEEN A SLAVE!'"

Young moves brilliantly from this unbearable tension to a symbol of the unresolved black presence in Mormon psyches and then back to the resulting fear and longing of the white narrator that is connected to black sexuality. Adam picks up his chocolate cake with both hands, as if to throw it at her father, but Giselle yells at him and he squishes it through his hands and onto the floor:

It came out between his fingers as though it were his pigment. He shook off what was left, then raised both his arms until they were positioned like Christ's, whose huge image was a shadow behind him. He howled, 'FEEL!' and ran for the stairs, Giselle after him. When she caught him, he screamed like he was dying, and she hugged him hard, saying, 'Lover, lover, lover, lover.' . . . It looked like she was suckling him.

Dad handed me his dishes, then Adam's and Giselle's. The chocolate cake was glopped on the floor. 'Someone ought to get that up,' Dad said softly. 'Before a person slips on it.' His eyes moved back to the stairs. I thought he might cry.

. . . Adam and Giselle were going to their room. I knew that when I finished bussing, I could hear them love. They would find that private rhythm, the music only

they could hear, that was part anger, part betrayal, part love, part need. Adam would go inside her, groaning, and she would kiss him, touch him, accept him, call him precious names. They would do mysterious, invisible things. (304)

Although Young's narrator remains a guilty outsider to this never-never land of mysterious sex and acceptance, Young has, like Cather, made a dangerous, courageous journey for us all. She, and this handful of others I have discussed, have produced works, like those in the American canon Morrison discusses, which lay bare, sometimes unconsciously, the encoded fascinations, the fundamental contradictions and "underscored omissions," that the guilt and denial, the disingenuousness and moral frailty, at the heart of Mormon racialism might be expected to produce in writers of conscience and imagination. But not nearly enough has been done. Besides the richness Morrison expects and finds in those who try to deal honestly with the black presence, there is still much need in Mormon literature for the redemptive effect of good writing in helping us deal with our huge and continuing denial of a major tragedy. Levi Peterson claims that the suppression of the Mountain Meadows Massacre from Mormon consciousness exacted a huge price in guilt and denial, and that Juanita Brooks, an honest historian serving in the role of classic tragedian, provided the crucial, redemptive catharsis of full disclosure, so that we could face our unbearable Mormon loss of innocence and forgive our ancestors and ourselves (52). Mormon racialism has been, I believe, an even greater tragedy, still haunting us, still hobbling our language and theology, and, with a few honorable exceptions, still largely avoided in Mormon literature.

We are still all victims of a racially inflected language and racially diminished popular theology, and writers can be a crucial help in unhobbling our imaginations from the demands of that language and theology. They can explore, as the five above have done so well, the rich implications of our Christian yearning, of being ghosts and outsiders, filled with fear and longing for a never-never land of full racial equality and affirmation that still lies somewhere to the South in our Mormon souls.

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## MAURINE WHIPPLE AND THE GRAND IDEA

Veda Tebbs Hale\*

One of the underlying factors I find in Maurine Whipple's life is her susceptibility to the beauty and wonder of the Grand Idea, the name she gave to the scriptural admonition to "love thy neighbor as thyself," which Maurine intuited to mean the mystical truth that humankind was essentially one. That she touched and captured an accurate shadow of it is probably why her *Giant Joshua* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1941), is still being read and appreciated after fifty years. And the interesting thing about her life is how that same susceptibility both lifted her and yet led to her being trampled by a world which actually functions in ways far different from that Grand Idea.

One of the more obvious surfacings of this inclination in Maurine is found among her papers in the form of an alternate ending for *Giant Joshua*. In it, Clory rose to new heights of altruism by offering her cherished red dress to Abijah's new bride, the shallow teenager going off to reap the reward that Abijah and his three older wives had earned. It is interesting, in light of the fact that Maurine felt her own life had been about as barren of justice as Clory's, that she ever considered having Clory make such a grand transcendent gesture.

Maurine's worldview accepted as a simple fact of life that the masculine holds the power that organizes and manipulates material reality, while the feminine is the inspiration to act and the ability to infuse action with meaning. It is also the feminine that pours life and joy into the results of the work. In Jungian terms, then, although Maurine did not use these terms, the Joseph Smith period of the Church can be seen as an outpouring of such feminine elements as creativity, spirituality, the formation of new relationships, and the negotiations of new encounters with the divine. Correspondingly, the Brigham Young period can be seen--and Maurine was one of the few who did--as a parallel and necessary balance to that early period, a masculine anchoring of spiritual insight in material reality. This historical rhythm caused suffering for those strongly identified with the male element during the Joseph Smith period and suffering for those, like Clory,

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strongly identified with the female element during the Brigham Young period. My respect for Maurine's perspective has deepened markedly by noting the accuracy of her perception that the bruisingly masculine world in which her grandmothers lived, which was close to the life of the fictional Clory, lacked respect for and validation of the feminine. The suppression and sacrifice of the feminine was simply a casualty of the times, one to be tolerated for the good of the whole. But while accepting that necessity, Maurine recognized the *Other* that was and is always available, not only to her characters including particularly her women, but also to herself. Struggling to find words to express contact with that transcendent sense of another reality, which embraced loving one's neighbor as oneself, Maurine chose the phrase, "the Great Smile."

For me, putting Clory's fictional experience with the Great Smile in a setting that included the tragic helps me to understand and reconcile the perpetual, dynamic tension between individual and institution, between the structural need for a strong organization and the psychological need for individual mystical religious experience. To have the outcome tragic from one standpoint only emphasizes the sublimity of the other and, strangely, does more lasting good for a broader meaning of that phenomenon called "testimony" than if some miraculous turn of events gave the book a rosy ending.

Soon after I met Maurine in the fall of 1990, I drove her to the beloved red hill, the Sugarloaf, overlooking St. George from the north. It was on this same hill that Clory, struggling with the difficulty of understanding why life has passed her by without rewards, is joined by Erastus Snow, the spiritual father of St. George. He has come, after being imprisoned for polygamy, in need of the same vantage point. Clory pours out her feelings: ". . . So you see I'm a failure. I'm like Free -- I didn't obey counsel either. Why, I haven't even got a testimony!" Erastus laughs and says: "Prison has taught me many things, Clorinda Agatha. . . . But I'll tell you--I'm not sure what a testimony is, myself." Then he continues:

"The way I look at it, the thing we've got that's immortal is an Idea. And maybe that's why we've been persecuted. . . . Maybe, human nature being what it is, the world will always stamp upon that Idea. . . . But you can't kill it, Clorinda Agatha --it's older than the world. . . . You may lose, Clorinda Agatha. I may lose. Zion may lose, for the time. But the Idea"--he saw all those myriads, the oppressed and downtrodden, marching hand in hand straight into the dawn of a better world--"the Idea can't lose." (620)

In a few shared moments, contemplating their own aloneness and vulnerability, Clory and Erastus see that humankind must retrace paths of growth between the masculine influence and the feminine over and over--but hopefully, more wisely and more evenly balanced

each time. They realize that the human task is to judge the array of competing visions, select the best, make a commitment to it, and then give it form and substance through organization, external trappings, loyalty, and the living of it.

"And when you finished *Joshua*," I mused after we had discussed the above passage, "it was 1941, just after the war started. I can just see you, Maurine, up on this red hill looking out over your beloved St. George. It must have felt as if the characters were still with you. I can see you trying to grasp the grand scope of what it all meant--means--will mean. It must have been like a mystic experience."

She laughed. "Well, I don't know. I just don't know. How can you explain? Much of the time I was writing the book it was as if I had shifted into a different consciousness. Often the words would be given me in a dream, or just before waking. And, oh, I do love *this place*! These people! There's just no place like it! And they did struggle so trying to live the Grand Idea. And I can't explain how it was writing the book. But, yes, it was like that. Like I was in a special state where the meaning and thoughts of those real people were getting through. But--yet it wasn't all like in a trance or something. I had to work real hard to get what I wrote."

I agreed. I knew it was so. "And what of the last paragraph of *Giant Joshua*?" I turned to it and read Clory's dying words:

"Jimmie," she said very clearly and distinctly, "will you see that my fingernails look nice? Sometimes the women neglect fingernails."

"Well, what of it?" Maurine asked.

"My opinion is that it is a stroke of genius. After having her touch this transcendent state where she experiences something of the Great Smile, you have her demonstrating just how difficult it is to retain that knowing in our consciousness. And vanity is there, so ever ready to spring in and claim us."

"Well, maybe you're right. I don't know. Yes, that is the way it could be, isn't it? But, also, I was trying to say that you need to have regard for yourself."

"Oh, that's interesting. So it wasn't exactly vanity." I was intrigued by this new insight. "It was a reflection of the state of spiritual maturity Clory had acquired? She understood that it was necessary to know her own worth before fully understanding The Grand Idea of brotherhood?"

Maurine seemed content that I had finally understood. We spent a few more minutes quietly watching the sunset and the breeze playing with a plastic bag before we had to leave.<sup>1</sup>

Later among Maurine's papers, I found her description of how the trilogy she planned to write with *The Giant Joshua* as the first volume would end. The characters, she said, would be:

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<sup>1</sup>This conversation distills several conversations we had looking over St. George from Sugarloaf. It is not a verbatim quote.

. . . left with the paradox of the dream unresolved, and thus forced to choose between conforming blindly or forsaking the dream altogether. . . . Or is there another alternative? Is there a compromise?

I can't answer the question. I don't attempt to answer it in the trilogy. For myself, I believe that the dream of brotherhood is possible, though only time can tell. Meanwhile, all any member of the human race can do is seek the Holy Grail amid the dream's debris.<sup>2</sup>

"To seek the Holy Grail amid the dream's debris." Unfortunately most of Maurine's life was spent "amid the dream's debris"--both before the completion of *The Giant Joshua* and after.

How successfully did *The Giant Joshua* communicate Maurine's Grand Idea to its readers? There is much evidence that it spoke reassurance and hope to the sick at heart, particularly during and after World War II. Maurine's folder of letters responding to the book between 1941 and approximately 1960 is some four inches thick. Letters still occasionally arrive in St. George expressing the same sentiment. The book was translated into eleven languages. From Amsterdam, Mr. and Mrs. T. U. Westerling wrote that, after all the Nazi horrors and wartime conditions, the thing they wanted most was books, books like *The Giant Joshua*, which had given them courage to successfully hide a Jew hidden during the war.

J. O. Christensen, of Christensen Mink Farm, Moroni, Utah, wrote on September 25, 1948:

"I read 'Gone With The Wind' largely because I had visited Tara and all the locale of the Civil War. I found it a more effective portrayal of the brutality and futility of war than all the sermonizing that has been done. But being entirely unaware of the matter of your 'Joshua'--and decidedly misled by some orthodox friends, I undertook the reading of it purely as a duty.

. . . I cannot consider it fiction; to me it is an adaptation to historical narrative--and done with a skill and understanding that should leave you everlastingly proud. I think our Mormon friends owe you a debt of gratitude for having retained in your narrative, every vestige of beauty and justification for a situation that was preponderantly ugly.

Mrs. Kai Peterson, Spenard, Alaska, March 20, 1966, commented:

I feel as if I'd lived there for several years, and had known intimately many of the old pioneers or their children. Very few people have this gift. Edna Ferber and

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<sup>2</sup>Maurine Whipple, Letter to Charlie Steen, n.d. but ca. 1961 or 1962, Brigham Young University Archives; photocopy in my possession.

Pearl Buck have it, yet I felt more "there" reading *The Giant Joshua* than in reading all of their books. Clory will always be like a past friend, and her troubles mine, her dislikes will be as my own, and her great victory over herself may someday be mine too. You understand men so well, and that is only surpassed by your understanding of women. In pointing out their follies and petty meanness, you only make them more human and thus they loom as true giants, rather than demigods.

Is one reason the book lives on because, as this person said, it gives hope that Clory and her great victory over herself might someday be ours, too?

Had we been given the sequel we would have had a more complete depiction of Maurine's philosophy. One draft of her proposed sequel includes this conversation between Frank (the son of David Wright and Clory's good friend, Palmyra) and Jim (Clory's son). Frank says:

"No great movement can ever be proof against the fanatics within its ranks. Salem had her witches! Take the Mountain Meadows episode. During those same years there were dozens of immigrant trains saved by the Mormon colonizers who risked an Indian uprising and their lives to do it; but history books leave out those facts and record only the one notorious incident. Take the old scandals about the Avenging Angels, 'blood atonement,' and the early murders for which our people were blamed; why, in one week in any Nevada mining town of the period, there were more killings than in all the whole history of Mormondom. Take those early whispers we used to hear as boys about 'castration.' Horrible, it is true, but certainly not typical; only one case has ever been heard of in the whole of Utah, and the gentile writers have magnified it until it stands out like a sore thumb. As for polygamy--it would have been just too bad if all the gentiles committing adultery had been jailed! I tell you, the gentiles brought lawlessness to Utah. There was very little before! And your mother's life was, after all, typical of the times in which she lived. All women were oppressed. . . . In the struggles of the Saints there's nothing of which to be ashamed and everything of which to be proud. . . .

"Religion really has very little to do with it; the things for which they struggled and died are ideals like charity and peace, surely worth dying for among any sect or people. It's the younger generation that worries me--if the education we have worked so hard to give them takes them away from us, and they won't come back--everything will have been wasted."

In this version, Maurine envisions Jim's daughter and Clory's granddaughter finally realizing that where she wants to be is back with her people. In rejecting a brilliant operatic career in New

York, Lenzi says to her agent:

"You never could understand. What to strive for is so far away, so deep, so beautiful that the only way to touch it is by living life itself. I know now I could never do it in song, but maybe it isn't too late to make a bit of that glory out of just living. My people had the vision. Uncle Frank used to call it 'the pattern' and he found it. He died holding my Aunt Molly's hand. His life was like a song, a harmony of living. That is the deepest beauty and the hardest to create."

And on her flight home, Lenzi muses on her father, Jim, who has felt bitter all his life because of the injustice he felt his mother had suffered. This perception had motivated him to make every possible effort to help Lenzi "escape." She thinks how she will explain her decision to him:

"It isn't particularly Mormonism, Jim, nor any other religion. I'm not particularly religious any more than you are, but you don't have to be religious to be one with your neighbors at home any longer. It's a town where you never lock a door! Out of all the places I know, there is more tolerance, sympathy, brotherly love, friendliness for all creeds, races, and peoples there, more of the milk of human kindness! That's my heritage, and I'm going back to claim it, to help it grow, for that spirit is a rare and beautiful thing. I want to raise my children there. And sing--of course, I'll sing! In Relief Society, in Sunday meeting. . . ."

Maurine wrote these words in the 1938 synopsis she sent to Houghton Mifflin, on the basis of which she received a fellowship to write *The Giant Joshua*. As she began her work, however, she realized she had too much material for one book. Much of her subsequent experience could have killed her vision. She experienced many discouragements and hardships. St. George was far from the idealistic community Lenzi anticipated living a richly quiet life in. Maurine was often depressed by world conditions. Still, she was stimulated to write whenever she sensed the Grand Idea manifesting itself in some person's vision or endeavor. Even earlier, before conceptualizing *The Giant Joshua*, she spent most of 1934-35 on the site where Boulder Dam was under construction and thrilled to the proud spirit of cooperation she sensed among the men and women laboring to accomplish that great project. She wrote an exuberant short story of love and sacrifice about it called, "Hell! It's Worth It!"

The Grand Idea figures prominently in another unfinished novel called *The Golden Door*. One of her characters, Senator Higgins, was modeled on Utah senator Elbert Thomas, a man Maurine knew and greatly admired. In one of his speeches, he says:

"Of course, I am an idealist, just as Wilson was an idealist. And we in America think of 'idealist' as an epithet, synonymous with 'visionary,' 'dupe.' We think that high principles are all right only if the men who hold them are safely dead. The 'idealism' of Jefferson and Lincoln and Wilson has become a swear word because we are afraid somebody will take us for suckers, just as they did last time. And yet, we must begin to see before it is too late, that the peace of Versailles was not lost because of idealism based on sentimentality and ignorance but because of the 'realism' of those who could feel neither confidence nor trust. It is the hard-headed realists whom we have most to fear. You see, Sergeant . . . " he leaned forward and the light from the open window glistened on his bald head, "too many Christians go around asking, 'am I my brother's keeper' without admitting that he is my brother! That is the important thing. . . . It is for us to understand these 'brothers' of ours, not their differences . . . but in what ways we are alike. . . ."

In 1954, Maurine met Charley Shadel, a self-made expert in alcohol rehabilitation, who was pioneering a new treatment. Again, Maurine saw in his efforts another manifestation of the Grand Idea and threw her own energies into writing the history of the sanatorium he founded and explaining his theory that alcoholism was caused by a missing enzyme and, hence, could be controlled much as diabetes is controlled by supplying the missing insulin. Ten years later, that dream had dissipated, the sanatorium had fallen apart, due to inside dissension, the promised solution remained unproved, and most of the alcoholics Maurine had tried to help, including her own brother, had relapsed.

Harold Sherman, Rotary Club, Christian Science, and other organizations and individuals joined a long list of those Maurine appreciated for their attempts to be carriers of The Idea.

Maurine was unusual in her early mistrust of and disillusionment with the atomic bomb. She clearly saw that the ultimate madness of nuclear war would be the end of anyone's chance to make the Grand Idea work and wrote a long story about nuclear testing in Southern Utah called "The Pickle Is a Dilly."

She also used other forums than writing. During World War II, as part of the war effort, she delivered fervent lectures under the sponsorship of a government agency in many towns and cities about the need for brotherhood.

In a 1972 letter to Norman Cousins commenting on this wartime effort, she observed:

I probably was successful for I was always given an encore. But still there was a nagging doubt: I didn't want to entertain people, I wanted to make them think. I was forever cognizant that preaching brotherhood as the aim and end of the struggle for peace isn't enough: What



is needed is an instrument, a tool, a technique that can actually change human nature."<sup>3</sup>

In her only other published book, *This Is the Place: Utah* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), she wrote a passionate concluding paragraph in which her idealism springs up undaunted: "For the old dream is with us still, but in new guise. It is a better dream than ever before. . . . For Brigham's vision of Utopia has outgrown the Great Basin. It is world-size" (214-15). This statement is prophetic in light of the Church's worldwide scope.

Her last great writing effort in the late sixties and seventies dealt directly with the Grand Idea. It was an interdenominational Easter pageant to be performed in Snow Canyon near St. George. Ironically, at the time she was writing it she was expending much time and energy trying to win justice for herself in St. George. She felt that she had been mistreated in a controversy over lost tapes of *The Giant Joshua*, her involvement in an auto accident, incidents involving her dogs, and other similar personal distractions. She missed deadline after deadline with the pageant. When she finally finished, its historical sweep and the sheer complexity of its staging overwhelmed the resources available in St. George at the time. After that, writing was very difficult; and, although she couldn't admit she had ceased writing, she produced only a few letters from then until the end of her life.

"But, Maurine," I protested once, "the world just can't handle loving your neighbor as yourself. Look at all the experiments there have been to try for it."

"That's beside the point," she rejoined. "That's why I call it the Grand Idea. Don't you see, that's why the Mormon experience under Joseph Smith and Brigham Young is so important. It was and is an attempt--and a good one--to make it work. Each time humankind tries to make it work, they learn something new, something that can make the next time that much better. It's just when people start thinking they're better than others, won't take criticism or make changes fast enough that failure comes."

"Well," I commented dubiously, "human nature being what it is, people always end up acting like that."

Maurine, still trying to be patient, continued, "But it's for dreamers like me to keep talking about it--damn-fool dreamers like me. Nothing ever worked out for me, did it? You know my life better than anyone."

"There's a paradox here someplace," I observed, half-amused and half-disturbed. "You, the Mormon sitting off-center, not even claimed in good standing, and it's you who want to lift Mormonism and spotlight the basic Mormon premise of brotherhood."

"That's because it's bigger than most Mormons know," Maurine insisted. "It's because I see the original premise still there, shining among the debris, just waiting for people to realize they

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<sup>3</sup>Maurine Whipple, Letter to Norman Cousins, August 1972, Whipple Collection.

don't have to wrap it in lies and secrecy to hide the mistakes of the past. They just need to pick it up, laugh at the funny crusty attitudes stuck to it, polish the gold, and go on. Try again, and again, and again. Laugh at themselves, at their past. It's just like individuals. The only thing that kept me going was that I could laugh at myself."

Maurine was a writer who wrote endlessly, yet seldom finished anything. She was handicapped by her inability to deal competently with finances and social reality. She approached her creative efforts too idiosyncratically, was too slow and disorganized in her writing efforts, needed too much physical and emotional support, and was too sensitive physically and spiritually. Yet in spite of all of her human frailties, she had one characteristic of genius: All her life she was captivated by a powerful spirit-stirring idea --the Grand Idea that we are our brother's keeper and we should love him as ourself.

## FORM AND CONTENT: ESTABLISHING THE PRINTING

### TEXT FOR MAURINE WHIPPLE: THE LOST WORKS

Lavina Fielding Anderson\*

When Curtis Taylor pulled *The Giant Joshua* off a friend's bookshelf, he had never heard of the book nor of Maurine Whipple. When he read it, he was deeply struck by the authenticity of its Mormon voice and the power of its representation of the Mormon experience and immediately wanted to know who the author was. Through a series of events, he met and befriended Maurine Whipple only a few years ago. He, like most readers of *The Giant Joshua*, wondered why Maurine had never written anything else after such a profound and stirring first novel, then discovered that she had. She had written constantly in the fifty years since the publication of *Joshua*. But she had published virtually nothing except for a travel book and some articles; and her masterpiece, the trilogy of which *The Giant Joshua* was the first volume, remained fragmentary.

Curtis, a partner in Aspen Books, conceived the project of publishing Maurine Whipple's lost works. Aspen is a publisher perhaps uniquely suited to undertake a project that appeals to a popular audience yet lays scholarly demands upon its presentation. One of the earliest books this recently formed company published was a collection of scholarly essays by Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, founding president of the Association for Mormon Letters, about Eliza R. Snow. One of Curtis's most recent books is the runaway best-seller by Bettie Eadie, *Embraced by the Light* (Gold Leaf Books, 1992). When Veda Tebbs Hale became a friend of both Maurine and her guardian, Carol Jensen in 1990, the team was in place to make this happen. Originally from southern Utah and herself a novelist, Veda not only speaks with rhythms and images that were familiar to Maurine, but she has the red-rock cast of mind that understands the geography of Maurine's spirit--family centered, always close to the edge of poverty, driven simultaneously by faith and defiance.

Veda willingly undertook the labor of love--and a labor it was--of sorting out the immense pile of manuscripts that Maurine

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\*Lavina Fielding Anderson, president of Editing, Inc., and long an admirer of Maurine Whipple, is coeditor with Veda Tebbs Hale, of Whipple's unknown works (forthcoming from Aspen Books). This paper was delivered at the Association for Mormon Letters annual meeting, at Westminster College, Salt Lake City, January 23, 1993.

had accumulated over the years. Typically Maurine wrote in four stages: First, she made a very rough scribbled story line consisting of quick phrases to capture the plot with some sketchy attention to characterization, dialogue, and climactic scenes. Second, she wrote out a full version in long-hand, usually margin to margin in her sprawling cursive on large newsprint sheets. She would frequently revise and correct these full versions, occasionally producing a final fair copy for the typist. (She learned to type late in life, but usually hired it done.) Third, she had these holograph versions typed, usually with one and sometimes with two carbons. Fourth, she would then go over these typescripts, frequently making changes, adding notes to herself about scenes she wanted to add, and making numerous small wording changes. Sometimes this was as far as she got, but sometimes she also had a second typescript made.

This method seems fairly straightforward; but as Veda found, the papers were far from orderly. Dennis Rowley had collected forty-one boxes of papers for Brigham Young University's Archives and Manuscripts Division at the Harold B. Lee Library in 1983, but Maurine had left several other boxes in her garage where the resident cats had literally used them for kitty litter. With the willing cooperation of the BYU Manuscripts Division, Veda read her way steadily through both enormous collections, enabling her to recognize from a name, a twist of plot, or a particular setting which story a loose page belonged with. Most of the manuscripts had been separated. Many, particularly those in the garage, were physically damaged, with sheets widely scattered and pages missing. After hours of patient sorting, she was able to group most of the pages with their fellows.

Definitely some material is missing. Maurine's house was burglarized and vandalized during the 1970s while she was out of town. She returned to find her manuscripts and papers strewn around the house. Parts of some projects were gone; but heartsick and overwhelmed by the disorganization, the elderly and ailing Maurine was never able to determine exactly what had been taken.

Maurine Whipple's papers are voluminous and varied. In form, they include notes on napkins, envelopes, 8.5 x 11" yellow notepads, shirt-pocket notebooks of various sizes, oversize sheets from newsprint and butcher paper rolls, and all kinds of loose papers, in addition to the more conventional reams of note paper and typing paper.

In content they include research notes, interviews, speeches, observations on books and articles, ideas for books and articles, rough drafts, revised drafts, annotated drafts, corrected drafts, and finished drafts of letters, sketches, story ideas, stories, articles, and sections of her novels. Except for the actual drafts, they are seldom dated or paginated and they are frequently incomplete.

Much of the material is in holograph. An inveterate reviser, Maurine seldom left a draft, even a "finished" draft, without additional changes. Furthermore, because a relatively high proportion of her work, except for her magazine articles, remained

unpublished, she could and did continue to make revisions sometimes years after the "final" typescript had been made.

Under these circumstances, cataloging presented a daunting challenge. In general, Veda determined a manuscript to be "finished" if it existed in any generation of typescript or in a fairly complete holograph version. Some impressionistic sketches that are obviously unfinished, however, are quite appealing to modern readers used to sketchiness and understatement. The many versions of *The Giant Joshua*, including the editing copy from Houghton Mifflin that reduced Maurine's unwieldy masterpiece to a more manageable size, has not received this careful attention. At least seven different types and versions of materials--holograph draft, typescripts, galleys, and typescript summaries--have simply been grouped together, as much as possible, awaiting the M.A. or Ph.D. student who wants to reconstruct the writing and editing history of what has long been considered one of Mormonism's finest novels.

I entered the picture as Veda's coeditor quite late in the process with the narrowly defined task of helping make the final selection, getting the project on disk, and providing consistent editing throughout the volume. In consultation with Curtis, we have decided on a middle-of-the-road approach in both content and form. First, Aspen Books has generously, even gallantly, committed itself to publish a large paperback volume of up to 400 pages within the limits of practicality. This generous page allotment enables us to present virtually all of Maurine's work that is complete enough or extensive enough to promise an interesting experience for the reader--in other words, stories that begin, work toward their climax, and complete themselves (for the most part). However, in addition to asking for reader-centered content, Curtis also expressed concern that the canons of textual accuracy be observed so that the work would represent Maurine authentically and that the reader would be able to distinguish easily between Maurine's hand and between ours. Although this dual concern has presented us with one series of challenges after another, it has been an unqualified pleasure to prepare this manuscript for publication.

Now, what exactly constitutes Maurine's "Lost Works"? Veda's diligent sorting and cataloging in both collections has produced a bibliography, which, though not completely final at this point, contains 106 items and the usual gray area about whether subdivided stories or parts of the sequel should count as separate items. The items selected for inclusion in the volume are a broad range of genres and forms: her diary from her first year of school teaching (and as far as we know, this is her only diary), a popular lecture she delivered to sell bonds during World War II, three letters, four poems, an ambitious and carefully polished Easter pageant that reveals remarkable depth of religious feeling, eight articles, four unfinished novels, and twenty-four short stories.

For the most part, when variants exist, we have selected the one which Maurine was able to identify as the most recent, one for which textual evidence exists of its being most recent, or a clearly identifiable version that seems to have particular merit. For example, she wrote several different versions of the annual

hike to Timpanogas Cave in Utah Valley, a community pilgrimage that literally involved hundreds of people during the 1950s. Some of these versions involved interesting experiments with point of view: with Maurine telling the story from a fairly straightforward first-person perspective, from that of a highly naive first-person narrator, and from a third-person male narrator. We chose the straightforward first-person version because it was more appealing to us, but an interesting project remains to be done for the scholar who compares the three versions.

It is true that Maurine never really stopped writing, although she was frequently interrupted by poverty and by frequent episodes of ill health. Still, her most intensely creative period was clearly the years immediately after the publishing of *The Giant Joshua*: The late forties, the decade of the fifties, and the early sixties. This period saw some remarkable developments in American literature in the short story and the novel--and Maurine seems to have read widely, energetically, and intelligently. However, both her literary tastes and her tools seem to have been formed earlier --in pre-war popular magazine fiction, in westerns and romances, and especially by the movies that she watched nightly as a child during the decade or so that her father managed a local motion picture studio. Veda will explore this question more thoroughly in her biography of Maurine, now in progress.

Consequently, in the editing, we have been careful to not make these stories "timeless." They were shaped by a sensibility that reflected its historical period. Among the technical ways in which these stories seem dated are very short sentences and paragraphs, in the style Ernest Hemingway made famous and that many schools of journalism have continued to emphasize since then. Maurine also routinely uses dashes or a series of dashes to indicate incomplete thoughts, faltering speech, or the passage of time. I have standardized spelling, punctuation, and paragraphing, according to modern conventions, to reduce these visual distractions for the reader. In some passages of fragmentary sentences where the form did not seem to contribute materially to the meaning of what was said, I have combined sentence fragments for smoother reading. The headnote introductions to each article or story describe these types of procedures.

The single instance where we felt justified in taking a heavier editorial hand was with Maurine's wartime lecture. At least thirteen different versions of this lecture exist among her papers, each with a different focus designed to appeal to a different audience. In the mid-1970s, she copyrighted one version delivered at Brigham Young University, updated with such contemporary references as the 1963 assassination of John F. Kennedy, the Watts race riots, and the Vietnam War. The version we use in the book was written for the International Federation of Women's Clubs during World War II, and it used masculine nouns and pronouns throughout, as was standard English for the time. However, given her own flexibility in revising this manuscript, the fact that she was a woman speaking to other women specifically about women's contributions to peace, and given the jarring effect of hearing her refer

simultaneously to "us" and to "man," we made these references gender-inclusive.

We have used a variety of techniques in cases where a story or article has missing pages or torn pages. In some cases, we have been able to find another version that covers the missing material and have substituted it. Sometimes, in the case of ragged sheets, we have been able to make a probable reconstruction. I remember one long-distance conversation, verging on the ludicrous, in which Veda and I with our respective typescripts in hand, figured out from the left-hand margin how many letters were missing on a torn sheet, then hypothesized and brainstormed all of the words that ended in "e"--the one remaining letter before the line resumed--that could come at the end of a fourteen-letter phrase. Once again, the headnote explains our editorial process and notes or brackets make such reconstructions clear but, we hope, minimally distracting in the text.

A more interesting editorial situation is presented in those cases where Maurine entered into the editorial process as an active participant. She died, quite suddenly, in April 1992; but up to that point, she was lucid and opinionated. Veda saw her frequently, took her for drives, discussed stories and poems with her, recorded Maurine's memories about how a particular story or article came into being, identified individuals who served as models for characters in many, and, most interestingly, probed what she intended for a story. Sometimes Maurine did not remember a story or could not reconstruct its background in detail; but frequently she did--and in either case, she was always willing to explore possibilities.

One of the stories in the collection is "A Grain of Mustard Seed," the story of a returned missionary about 1917 or 1918 who is deeply in love with his wife. When she becomes ill with the influenza, he rallies his missionary companions and they help him bless her as she is breathing her last or, in some versions, has actually expired. She is restored. One page is missing from the twelve-page typescript version at the section where the young man is returning from his mission, mentally reviewing it in flashback. It seemed crucial to understand the origin of a faith so profound that it was sufficient to raise the dead, so Veda worked with Maurine to supply a bridging episode with Maurine telling stories of family experiences and family background. The actual reconstructed section is longer than a page in the reconstructed typescript because of the experiences Maurine felt were important to add. Veda drafted these experiences, then read them to Maurine, modifying and editing them according to her response, suggesting alternatives when an idea of Maurine's seemed to lead nowhere, and thoroughly enjoying the collaboration. The beginning and ending words of this reconstructed passage are indicated with footnotes to that effect.

Perhaps more important in this experience, however, is the parallel reconstruction of Maurine Whipple's religious feelings. Her youthful idealism and devoutness, which shine through clearly in *The Giant Joshua*, were badly shaken by its negative reception

among the very people she had intended it to honor. Thanks to Curtis Taylor's long-distance "hometeaching," as she calls it, Maurine went to the temple and received her endowments during her last years. However, she was not a traditional Mormon for much of her life. She felt distanced from the Church and from her community in St. George by her lack of a traditional (and much longed-for) marriage and children, her unconventional lifestyle as a writer, her vigorous personality, and her excitable temperament--emotional and intense. Yet she was fiercely proud of her Mormon heritage and had a strong spiritual life in her own way.

Veda had an interesting experience, personal also to her, during her discussion with Maurine of this story, and Veda has included this experience, written in her own words, in the introduction to the this story. Veda writes:

This reconstruction is particularly meaningful since, at the same time, my daughter-in-law was experiencing a difficult pregnancy with the placenta blocking the cervix. At her stage of pregnancy, the doctor informed her, there was less than a 10 percent chance of spontaneous correction. This condition is potentially fatal to both mother and child during vaginal delivery, so the routine medical procedure is to perform a Caesarian section. My son and his wife struggled with the question of whether to pray for a "miracle" since the medical procedure was well-established. Yes, the recovery would be longer, which would cause problems with caring for the other children, one fourteen months old and the other two.

Out of my own perplexity but also hoping to help Maurine recall how she had conceptualized "A Grain of Mustard Seed," I reminded Maurine of the literally lethal applications of faith in "Mormon Saga" and "Thy Will Be Done" [both of these stories involve a situation something like the death of Willie in *The Giant Joshua*, in which someone dies because a rigid patriarch relies on faith alone and refuses to summon medical assistance], then asked, "Is it misusing faith to ask for something that can be taken care of by surgery?"

Crisply, Maurine replied, "There's a difference between stupidity and faith."

"Of course, the husband and wife in 'Mustard Seed' had a doctor come and, no doubt, prayer and even priesthood administration," I persisted. "But should the husband have demanded a miracle? Shouldn't he have prayed, 'Thy will be done'? Or is that sidestepping the issue because asking for miracles is scary?"

"That's really the important question, isn't it?" she said penetratingly. "Whether it is fear asking." She then related the experience of sitting beside the hospital bed of a family member who was expected to die. "I just let my mind reach out somehow. It was prayer, I



know--prayer and then letting there be something like a connection from her to me; and I let love and prayer move along it. No, I had no doubts. I had shifted them someplace else. I just sat there, not forcing anything and yet being so focused that, in a way, I was willing something to happen. But that's not quite it either. It was as if willing, wanting, and trying to force something to be were stepped over and something else was allowed to happen."

"What happened?" I asked.

"Well, whatever it was let her fall into a peaceful sleep and she got better." [Veda continues:]

I witnessed the strong and fervent blessing my son pronounced on my daughter-in-law. At her next examination, the doctor informed her that the placenta has spontaneously shifted; the delivery was normal.

Then, in our introduction, we say this:

In our opinion, "A Grain of Mustard Seed" represents a maturing of faith after the youthful skepticism expressed in "Mormon Saga," written in college, and "The Lord Giveth," written while near the time of her second year of teaching (1927-28). "Mustard Seed" represents an important development, since our usual model of adult development shows a religious individual becoming more skeptical but seldom postulates the recovery of a mature faith, one that acknowledges doubts but rests on a higher knowledge.

Certainly many Mormon readers of Maurine Whipple will have gone through precisely that stage of religious development.

Veda, Curtis, and I will be interested in the future of Maurine Whipple's *Lost Works* when they are published. Will they appeal to the broad range of Saints who shunned *The Giant Joshua*, knowing, only vaguely, that "the Church" disapproved of it? Will they be of interest only to those who have an antiquarian's interest in it because of *The Giant Joshua*? Or will this book find its place in Mormon literature as part of the ongoing dialogue among creators and critics, among those who seek to portray belief and who are believers?

**WHERE NOTHING IS LONG AGO:**

**MEMORIES OF VIRGINIA SORENSEN WAUGH**

*Shirley Brockbank Paxman\**

The Association of Mormon Letters has honored Virginia Sorensen Waugh in many ways--with an honorary lifetime membership (which pleased her very much) and with a number of papers given by scholars such as Susan Howe, Bruce Jorgensen, Eugene England, Ed Geary, and others.

Knowing this, and since I am not a scholar in that sense, I have chosen to give a personal essay about Virginia and her gift of story-telling, which was so evident in her published writings, her journal entries and, most of all, in her conversations. In many ways, she was the ultimate raconteur.

Borrowing a phrase from Joseph Campbell which Susan Howe quotes, "We tell stories to come to terms with the world and to harmonize our lives with reality." I can't think of anyone whose writings revealed a lifetime of harmonizing with reality more than Virginia.

She said her Mormon novels were about "alienation," about trying to find the truth when knowledge of the truth led to alienation, pain, and suffering. In a sense what could be said about her novels could be said about her life, and all of our lives.

As many of you have experienced, an acquaintanceship with Virginia was never peripheral. Friendships, deep and abiding, were her hallmark, so perhaps friendship is a good place to start. Her lifelong friendships from her childhood were immortalized in *Where Nothing Is Long Ago*. Carol Holt was her dearest friend for seventy-five years and is identified by name as the narrator's companion. Virginia wrote *Where Nothing Is Long Ago* when she spent eight months in Utah caring for her father after her mother's death in 1962. She said of this time, "I was steeped in nostalgia."

She attended BYU in the early thirties where she knew and

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\*Shirley Brockbank Paxman of Provo, Utah, is a Mormon feminist, owns the McCurdy Historical Doll Museum, and "writes papers only by invitation." She knew Virginia Sorensen, her husband's cousin, since college days when Virginia was a good friend of her older sister. Virginia's first husband, Fred Sorensen, was Shirley's English teacher in seventh and eighth grades. This paper was presented at the Association for Mormon letters annual meeting, January 22, 1994, Westminster College, Salt Lake City.

worked with Sam and Gaye Taylor, Theron Luke, and others. They were all dear friends until the day she died. When she came to speak at the McCurdy Doll Museum in 1983--her first public appearance after the death of her husband, Alec Waugh, in 1981--she was delighted and surprised to see so many of these friends who came to hear her. She said, "That's why I keep coming here, because there are people here who know who I am and what I have written."

Old friendships were very important to her. Of Bill Mulder she said: "I have two things to say to Bill: First, I want to thank him for his help and motivation in writing the Danish books." *Kingdom Come* and *Lotte's Locket* were both written while on a Guggenheim Fellowship. Bill's research on Scandinavian immigration started her on her journey to Denmark. "And second, I regret that I never finished the trilogy."

Mary Bradford became another lifelong friend after she wrote her master's thesis on Virginia and followed it with an important *Dialogue* article. They kept in touch continually. Anne Marie Smith, a librarian at Utah State University, was the first one to tell Virginia that the best characters in her books were the children. Like Hans Christian Andersen, her hero and mentor, Virginia received her greatest fame from her children's stories. They are the only books currently in print.

From her Stanford days where she and Fred lived while he pursued his advanced degree came the wonderful lifelong friends such as Obert and Grace Tanner, Wallace Stegner, and others. She lived in ten different states and on three different continents and had close friendships from every residency. She kept in touch with people by writing, visiting, and calling. She was the original "reach out and touch someone." She had unbelievable friendships with relatives and kinfolk. We were fortunate to be included in this group. Monroe's and Virginia's grandfathers were brothers so they were kissing cousins. (I had the good fortune to have Fred Sorensen as my eighth-grade English teacher in Provo. He was a memorable and impressive man and a superb teacher.) She lived at the Eggertsen home in Provo while attending BYU so she was very close to her Aunt Annie and Uncle Lars Eggertsen and their family--Algie Eggertsen Ballif, Thelma Eggertsen Weight, and Esther Eggertsen Peterson, all the daughters of Annie and Lars and cousins whom she adored. The "Esther" in "Plain Girl" is named for her illustrious cousin Esther Peterson, with whom she often stayed when she was in Washington, D.C. Marley and Joe, in "Miracles of Maple Hill" were named for the children of her brother Paul. And Kate Alexander is based on her own grandmother, Kate Blackett Eggertsen, whom she remembered with great devotion. When her sisters, Helen Eggertsen DeLude and Geraldine (Jerry) Eggertsen Simmons, died, she adopted me as her sister, saying that I didn't need another sister, since I had eight, but that she did! It was a true sisterhood that lasted many years.

Virginia also treasured new friends. When I invited Susan Howe to come to our cabin for lunch to meet Virginia and talk about the "Little Books" of Virginia's rare poems in September 1991, a special bonding took place. She also "took to" Linda Sillitoe, John

Sillito, and their daughter, Cynthia, to Levi Peterson, Leslie Norris, and others she met more recently. We were all enclosed in the circle of her great capacity for caring and sharing.

After her marriage to Alec Waugh in 1969, her circle expanded to include people on an international scale. Her friendship with the Waugh family was very harmonious, both with Alec's children and with those of his brother, Evelyn. It says a lot about Virginia that both families felt comfortable about visiting her in the United States. Veronica, Evelyn's daughter came to visit her for a week, and she kept in touch with all of them. Virginia was not a name-dropper. It was distasteful to her, but she cherished relationships; and in any ordinary conversation, a story would pop out.

For example, Virginia met Robert Frost, when she went to her first Breadloaf writer's workshop. Fred accompanied her to it, and all three became good friends. "Frost loved Fred," Virginia said, "Frost was a man who talked just as he wrote and he and Fred saw eye to eye about what Frost called 'this God business'." The Sorensens also became friends with Theodore Morrison and his wife, who were Frost's caretakers.

Carl Sandburg's home "Connemara" was in North Carolina near where Virginia lived near Hendersonville. Sandburg's wife, Helga, had been a friend of Virginia's for some years; and when she moved to North Carolina, Sandburg's granddaughter, Paula Steichen, also became a good friend. Virginia enjoyed sharing literary interests with Paula and later served as a docent at "Connemara" for a number of years.

Ezra Pound's son, Omar, was principal of the American School in Tangier, where Virginia taught a writing class after school. He was married to Alec's cousin. Alec and Omar would spend hours talking about the horrors of being sent to boarding school at an early age. (Alec's first book was about boarding school, and he was one of the first writers to discuss the problem of homosexuality in British boarding schools. His frankness brought him reprimands from many people.) Virginia said Omar Pound never knew his father although he and his mother visited Ezra Pound every day he was interned in St. Elizabeth's psychiatric hospital in Washington, D.C.

Graham Greene was another very old friend of Alec's. Virginia and Alec visited him in France many times at his home in Nice. Once when the three of them were in New York at the same time they had lunch together at the Algonquin, where the Waughs always stayed when they were in New York. Virginia was struggling over a title for her Danish novel and said to Graham, "I wish I could find a title as perfect as you did for *The Power and the Glory*. Then like a bolt of lightning came the words *Kingdom Come*!" She always credited Graham Greene with her title and said both his and hers came from the same source.

Another time when the Waughs were in New York they were invited to a very elegant dinner party in honor of Mr. Rothenstein, the director of the Tate Gallery in London. The Metropolitan Museum of Art was opening a new wing and had invited Mr. Rothenstein to

participate. At this dinner, Virginia was surprised to be seated next to the guest of honor. When she protested to the hostess that she "knew nothing about art," she was told that Mr. Rothenstein had requested to sit by her because she was a Mormon.

During the dinner he told her that the Mormon temple near London had been built on his ancestral holdings and that the manor house was his former residence. He complained that when he had gone to see the temple "they wouldn't let me in, although I am a world authority on architecture." He asked if she would tell him how he could get in the temple and in solemn tones she said, "Well, first you have to be baptized for the remission of your sins" (a long pause while this sank in) "and then you must give one-tenth of your income to the Mormon Church. Then you can go in." A soft long-drawn-out "ooh" was the only answer she got.

Once when I asked Virginia if she had seen the PBS documentary on Beatrix Potter she said yes, and she had liked it very much. It was based on a biography of Beatrix Potter written by Margaret Lane. She commented that Margaret Lane was Lady Huntington, the wife of Lord Huntington, who was the last male descendent of Robin Hood. She and Alec had visited them a number of times at their old castle near Sherwood Forest. The Huntingtons also had refurbished an old castle in the Casbah in Tangier. Alec had introduced Jack Huntington to Margaret at one of his parties.

Alec was famous for his parties. One day while reading the gourmet section of *House Beautiful*, I was interested to read that he was credited with inventing the "cocktail party." He was an internationally famous connoisseur of wines and wrote the *Time-Life* book on wines, along with many articles about wine in noted publications. It is a bit of irony that he married a Mormon woman whose family were teetotalers!

With Virginia every name recalled some fascinating story about people and places. It's about Virginia's sense of place that I would like to talk about next. Her awareness of the significance of place is evident in everything she has written. She said that if you have people (characters), a problem, and a place you had a story to write. Her sense of place was closely tied to her place of origin. "I know what a paradise of space we had to live in. This is a good place for Saints to spend a millennium," she once wrote.

Closely related to her sense of place was her love of houses. In her talk to the children at the Doll Museum she told in great detail about the playhouse she and Jerry built in the old granary in the back lot of their home in Manti--how they cleaned it out, scrubbed it, and made rooms from the six grain bins. They had to climb over the partitions to get from one "room" to the other. They decided they needed a stove and there was a play stove in the window of the hardware store for \$14.95, which was a great deal of money in those days. They had been saving for a bicycle and decided that the need for the stove was greater than the need for a bicycle. But they didn't have \$14.95. They counted out their savings, took it to the store, and told the man about their dilemma. That kind man said, "I think it is important that you have the stove, so I will trust you to pay the rest later." In after

years, Virginia always went to see this fine old man, remembering his kindness to two little girls.

In talking about their play house, she read from her friend Robert Frost's poem, "Directive":

There is a house that is no more a house  
Upon a farm that is no more a farm,  
And in a town that is no more a town.

First there's the children's house of make-believe,  
Some shattered dishes underneath a pine,  
The playthings in the playhouse of the children.  
Weep for what little things could make them glad.  
Then for the house that is no more a house,  
But only a belilac-ed cellar hole,  
Now slowly closing like a dent in dough.  
This was no playhouse but a house in earnest. (520)

I think it was Levi Peterson's story about "My Mother's House" that endeared him to her. We read it at Wildwood aloud and she ended up weeping for the "house that was no more a house."

She loved Esther's house in Washington, D.C., Algie's house in Provo, her house in Tangier, which was furnished half in Danish and half in Moroccan, and she loved our house which she said was "a house in earnest."

She also loved houses of worship. Listen to this description of the Manti Temple, written in her journal on her last visit to Utah in September 1991, when Susan Howe took her on her last pilgrimage:

Nearly the whole journey from Ephraim to Manti, the Temple rose gradually in front of us and when we reached it and rode up to the very walls, it shone as never before, even in the transfiguration of my childhood memory.

Even my morning walks in Paris from St. Louis across the Seine to the Cathedral of Notre Dame hadn't a more inspiring feeling. It is built of white sandstone, white that has a kind of glitter in the sun --a golden white. One wonders why thousands of statues have not been created from a stone so naturally angelic.<sup>1</sup>

Mountains were also sacred places to Virginia. Her love of Timpanogas knew no bounds. She wrote a play about it in college which was later produced by some of Fred's students in Colorado. Her love of mountains was one of the reasons she settled in Hendersonville, North Carolina. The Blue Ridge mountains were so near. Writing about one of her trips with her son, Fred, she wrote,

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<sup>1</sup>Written on loose sheets as a guest of the Shirley and Monroe Paxman; original in Shirley's possession.

"Early one morning we started for the mountains and found a lovely lake to walk around. It had a little river very like yours at Wildwood. I waded across it with much joy. On the drive home we came a circle through some blue ridges, that flowering world above us here which is always waiting like a child's notion of heaven. North Carolina mountains are not as dear to me yet as Mt. Timpanogas, the dearest mountain in the world."

Despite her love for Utah, it was enormously important to her as a person and as a writer to have the freedom of living outside Utah. In her last interview in the late 1980s in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, she said, "If I had stayed in Utah I would have had to lead a double life. Here, it's difficult to talk to my friends because I don't want to shake their beliefs. Here there is no doubt. How could I challenge that kind of faith? Yet, I'm fearful for Mormon intellectuals because they can't share their feelings. There is a searching and there is a pain, but it is unexpressed, much like Mormon writers in my time."

The intimate relationships in Virginia's life outside of her birth family were her two husbands. Late in her life in an interview she was to say that both her marriages were happy marriages. She started a journal and called it "Journal of a Happy Woman" in 1939. Thirty years later in 1969 when she married Alec she started another journal and again called it "The Journal of a Happy Woman."

Virginia fell in love with Fred Sorensen in college. They were married in 1933. She graduated in 1934 from BYU and received her diploma while in the hospital for the birth of their son Fred. Their daughter Beth was born while they were at Stanford in 1936. When they went to Palo Alto so Fred could work on his advanced degree, his mother came to live with them. She stayed with them for nine years. Fred was an only child, his father having died when he was eighteen months old. "Grandma Sorensen was a 'child expert,'" recalled Virginia. She didn't believe in rocking children or nurturing them. Virginia would have to get up in the night to cuddle and hold her babies. Later when Fred went to Chicago to do some advanced studying, he took his mother with him to keep house, leaving Virginia home in Palo Alto, with the two children. It was while they were living in Terre Haute, Indiana, that Virginia rented a carrel at Indiana State University where she went every day and started to write *A Little Lower Than the Angels*. It was a relief and a refuge for her to get out of her house. Yet her marriage was a good one and a happy one at that time.

Before they were married, Fred had given her a little book when she went to study journalism at the University of Missouri. (She was dismayed to find she couldn't be accepted because too many of her credits from BYU were disqualified due to the religion classes she had been required to take.)

With the gift of the "little book" Fred said, "I would give you a life, and a book to write it in." That first book she called a Book of Days and it was an engagement gift to Fred. For sixteen years she kept these little books, a personal diary with almost daily notations. She gave one to Fred each year on his birthday.

The books are full of poetry. Perhaps this little verse explains Virginia's mind set in the early days of her marriage:

You are the strength of security  
I am the frail of fear.

You are the certain century,  
I am the transient year.

You are the tree, I am the fruit  
I am the leaf, you are the root.

I am little, you are much.  
You are the pressure, I am the touch.

Reading this over forty years later, Virginia laughed and said, "It didn't turn out that way. Fred was not the strength of certainty!"

"I am little, you are much." As long as Virginia stayed "the little," their marriage thrived. But Fred also wanted to be a writer and his frustrations over her success often led to violence. The greater her fame, the greater his anger until it became life-threatening to her. He became an alcoholic and very abusive both physically and verbally. Virginia once said, "I've had a serene life. I have never known violence except at a distance"--meaning the desert wars outside Tangier--"and in my own home."

They divorced in 1958; and in the divorce settlement, Fred got the Little Books which had been gifts to him. Before his death in 1965, Virginia was surprised to get a letter saying that the items Fred had put in storage were to be auctioned for nonpayment. She raced to the place, paid the money, and retrieved those precious little books, which are now at the BYU, have been microfilmed and will be published under Susan Howe's sponsorship.

Her marriage to Alec was quite different. They met at the McDowell Colony writers' workshop in 1957. Of that meeting she said, "I didn't dream that some day he would belong to me." They were married at the military post chapel on Gibraltar, a British colony, in 1969. When Alec wrote the news to his brother Evelyn, Evelyn wrote back, "Thank you for telling me about your nuptial plans. I shouldn't have liked to read about it in the *London Times*. You say she is a well-known American author. I wouldn't know. I haven't read anything written by an American for over a quarter of a century."

Alec did everything for Virginia. "It was all so new to me," she said. "I would have been a much better writer if I had known him from the beginning, and yet, when we were together we had difficulty writing."

They lived in Tangier for fifteen years, visiting England twice a year "to see the roses" and talk to publishers and family. They both belonged to PEN International and attended the conventions for many years. Abijan, Dublin, Oslo, London, Vienna, Zagreb--"We knew everybody!" she wrote. And indeed they did: Norman Cousins, Alistair and Harriet Cook, Alfred and Blanche Knopf,



Bernard de Voto, Mary Norton, Lucy Boston, and many others.

Alec understood the demands of being a writer and he also approved of strong women. Virginia was very much like the women in her novels, especially the Mormon novels--a strong, independent individual. The men in her stories were supportive but always secondary. Thus Virginia was an early Mormon feminist. As Linda Sillitoe wrote in a 1988 essay in *Utah Holiday*: "By raising up a score of passionate women characters within a patriarchal system, Sorensen illuminates both a sense of inevitability that pervades Mormonism and small towns, and the frequent discomfiture such well-defined boundaries impose on the individual Virginia Sorensen brings us--aspiring, mortal, pervasive, idealistic (people) who live on their printed pages on a flawed and abundant world she makes unceasingly interesting."

Virginia never thought of herself as a poet; but she had five poems printed in the 1934 publication *Utah Sings*, a compilation of Utah poets. Here is one she had written in 1930, when she was eighteen:

Tell, lest I go worshipping before a silly shrine  
What ultimates to seek to crown this precious life of  
mine.

Is physical ultimate, or is it only shoddy?

Shall I reap my family from brain or body?

Shall I stretch my touch in seeking North and South

Or keep myself at home to taste the kisses on my mouth?

So even in those early years she was evaluating the choices, career versus homemaking. She was one of the lucky ones. She had them both and did equally well with either choice. Alec adored her domesticity. Once in Hong Kong she was sewing a button back on his jacket, and he marvelled at her ability to do so. "My, you are so clever!" he exclaimed quite sincerely. In his own home, such work was done invisibly by servants or nannies.

As Virginia's physical world expanded with Alec, so did her view of life. As she approached her eightieth decade, she was still seeking answers, but the questions were different. She wrote in a letter to me: "I'm beginning to talk in centuries. I wish I could start over, knowing what I know now. There are so many stories to tell, but now it is a time where everything is long ago."

In 1989 she sent me excerpts from her journal written in 1983:

One of the best things to have lived into one's own century is the feeling of eternal life, made at last reasonable and even plausible by seeing the series *Cosmos* and reading marvelous revelations in new magazines. One ceases to think of rot and flowers. Clean ashes blow in vagrant breezes, bounce along on mighty rivers and float into Saganic star-stuff. There are now sensibly documented and believable at last innumerable suns and stars. Vast pathways going around and around, enough chaotic jolting and burning to be interesting, and orderly beauty beyond belief. One's transition from here to there may be

a rather nasty one, but life on this planet has provided a number of ugly incidents over the years through which one lived to a happy ending.

A happy ending was certainly there for Virginia.

She and Alec talked about death openly. They both thought she would go first. Alec had a phrase about dying: "He made a good death," he would say. Both Alec and Virginia made a "good death." He died from a stroke at eighty-three in 1981. She was grateful that he had brought her home from Tangier a year earlier so she would have family to help her when he was gone. He had never been ill a day in his life, even though he had fought in two World Wars and had been a prisoner of the Germans for eighteen months. When he died, his son, Andrew, came from Hong Kong straightaway, where he was serving as an officer in the British Navy. He was escorted by the United States Navy, given full honors and an escort. He took his father's ashes back to England where they were interred in an old London cemetery at Hampstead near the graves of Alec's parents.

Virginia loved to visit cemeteries. She said that seeing her mother's name engraved on her headstone gave her a feeling of permanence. On the last day of her last visit in September 1991, we went to the cemetery to say goodbye to her mother, her father and her sister Helen. She placed a bouquet on each grave, then folded little notes she had written and tucked them under the tufts of grass around the headstones. It was her farewell to them.

She died on Christmas Eve in 1991, going quietly into that good night. She did not suffer unduly. She had loving hospice care and Fred and Beth were both with her. Her ashes, like Alec's, are near those of her parents and her sister Helen in the Provo cemetery. She has a magnificent view of her beloved Mount Timpanogas, and I'm sure she rests in peace in the valley she loved so much. Her sense of place is secure for the eternities.

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## KINDLY IRONIC VISION IN RICHARD SCOWCROFT'S NOVELS

Glen J. Wiese\*

### Introduction

During autumn quarter 1985, six of us from Weber State decided to prepare an Ogden community summer series of lectures on six Utah writers. I chose Richard Scowcroft and read his six novels but found no literary criticism on his works. I wrote a twenty-four-page critical paper for an audience I assumed had read few of his novels and presented the paper to about 150 citizens of the Ogden area. After my reading, two women approached me. The elder was Ellen Scowcroft Scotty and the younger was her daughter Marilyn Scotty Modeling. Ellen told me I had captured the tone and spirit of her brother's novels. She died soon afterwards; but Marilyn told me that Ellen had phoned Richard and told him about the lecture series and my paper. Marilyn was only three years younger than Scowcroft and more like his sister than his niece.

Parts of the paper were later printed in the Weber County Library's publication, *Rough Draft*. Gwen Williams, a family friend, sent Scowcroft a copy; and he later wrote me. The letter, written in a very infirm hand, is very special to me personally and quite revealing of his personality:

August 7 1992

Dear Professor Wiese:

Gwen Williams sent me *Rough Draft* with your article about my novels. It caught me at a rough time--my wife's death and my wretched health. (Scowcroft irony: I was the one who was supposed to die. But yes--irony laughing.) You pulled me out of deep despair. I had assumed my novels had died a quick death many years ago.

My sincerest thanks,  
Richard Scowcroft

. Sorry about the writing.

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\*Glen J. Wiese, a professor in the English Department at Weber State University where he has taught since 1959, is a specialist in twentieth-century American literature. This paper was delivered at the Association for Mormon Letters annual meeting, at Westminster College, Salt Lake City, January 23, 1993. The personal introduction providing family on Scowcroft was written in December 1994.

I phoned Marilyn and learned Scowcroft had been terribly ill in 1986 just before Thanksgiving. He had been rushed to the hospital for emergency surgery but was in a coma for two months before reviving. He was an additional four months in the hospital before he was well enough to leave. His devoted wife, Ann, cared for him for about five years, then died very suddenly in 1992, sitting in her car in a parking lot.

In 1992 I was asked to present something about Scowcroft's novels to writing students at my old alma mater, Ogden High. I chose to focus on Scowcroft's first novel, *Children of the Covenant*, because of its setting in the Ogden area and because it was Scowcroft's "Mormon" novel.<sup>1</sup>

I showed Scowcroft's letter to Levi Peterson. Levi, like me, was touched and thought Scowcroft should be recognized as a Utah writer before he died. He invited me to submit a proposal to the Association for Mormon Letters, which was accepted. The analysis which follows is a fuller version of the presentation version.

I was familiar with the Scowcroft family because I regularly passed the Scowcroft goods and food distribution center on the east side of Wall Avenue between 23rd and 24th streets. It was founded by John Scowcroft and was called Scowcroft and Sons Warehouse. The sons were Heber and Joe. Heber married Ellen Pingree, and they had three children. Their oldest son, Jim, is the father of Brent Scowcroft, national security advisor to President George Bush. After Ellen's sudden death, Heber married her sister, Ada Pingree, and they had eight children. Richard, the youngest, was born in Ogden in 1916. Heber died when Richard was six, and his mother moved the family to Salt Lake City. Richard attended East High, the University of Utah, and Harvard. He met his wife, Ann Kendell, an easterner, while he was at Harvard; she had a degree in English from Radcliffe and taught at Smith. After Richard taught writing at Harvard for three years, they moved to California to teach in the creative writing program with Wallace Stegner. Ann also taught some classes at Stanford. Their three sons are Roger, an attorney and public defender in Salt Lake City, Phil, Ph.D., who teaches math at Wesleyan University in Middleton, Connecticut, and Mark, Ph.D., who teaches ancient languages at Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. The family has always been very close.

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<sup>1</sup>Incidentally, one of the Utah writers covered in the same lecture series was Wayne Carver, a former teacher of mine at Weber College. He had graduated from the University of Utah and had taught for forty years at Concordia in Minnesota. One day in 1992 when he was visiting at Weber State, we met in the hall and talked. I mentioned Scowcroft's novels, and Wayne told me that he had found a copy of *Children of the Covenant* in a used book store in New York City, just after he was discharged from the army at the end of World War II. He read it on his train ride from New York to Ogden and said that, at the time, he thought it was the definitive Mormon novel. He had recently reread it after forty-four years and still thought it was one of the best Mormon novels.

Although Dick Scowcroft has to use a dialysis machine to stay alive, I met him and Mark at Marilyn Modeling's Ogden home in the summer of 1994 for a luncheon and conversation. Marilyn had arranged for Mark to travel from Washington, D.C., to California to accompany Richard to Salt Lake City and then Ogden so that he could meet me. I found Dick Scowcroft exciting--bubbling with wit, charm, and wisdom, a lover of life, ideas, and culture, a world wanderer, liberal, tolerant, hungry to learn, and enthusiastic in sharing his vision and experience. Richard gave me a copy of *The Ordeal of Dudley Dean* with a personal message and his signature written in it. I was moved by the experience, which reinforced my belief about Scowcroft, the artist and person, derived from his novels. He should be remembered!

### Scowcroft's Six Novels

Richard Scowcroft's six novels, written during a period of about thirty years (1943-73), reveal a keen observer, traveler, thinker, social critic, and lover of language and life. Scowcroft is imaginative, witty, sensitive, and wise--a man who has lived abundantly and has enjoyed it immensely because he sees the humorous and serious in life and reverences both. His kindly ironic vision penetrates complexities in human experience, and his skill with language shares those complexities in dazzling ways, inspiring admiration for and wonder about people and life's possibilities. To share a small part of that vision and that power is the purpose of this paper. Indeed, doing so will show that Scowcroft's novels are a notable literary achievement.

To keep the paper of a manageable length, I will focus on only four basic achievements of the novels: they have interesting stories; they bring to life four memorable characters; they contain rich, delightful language; and they share believable, perceptive experiences about people and life--experiences that call for an enlightened, broad view of life.

### Plot in Scowcroft's Novels

In his first novel, *Children of the Covenant*, his "Mormon" novel published in 1945, Scowcroft uses a realistic setting of the Ogden, Utah, area during the 1880-1926 period. Readers familiar with Ogden in the 1920s will find interest in a walk down 25th Street from Monroe to Wall avenues with such landmarks as the Ogden High School on the southwest corner of Monroe, then west by the Weber Gymnasium, Central Junior High, White City Ballroom, Broom Hotel, Ross and Jacks, United Cigar Store, Armstrong's Sporting Goods, Brighten Club, Cheyenne Hotel, and the 28 Club. Journeying up Ogden Canyon, one sees the Hermitage, the gray cliffs, and the lush meadow with willows and artesian wells dotting the upper Ogden Valley.

Of wider interest is the story line that presents three generations of a strong line of devout Mormons, the fictional Burton family, of North Ogden and later of Ogden. A prologue gives

the background of the old patriarch, Brother Burton, and his family of three wives, sixteen sons, and three daughters. He is a grandfather twice before his last child is born, a pillar of the Church, and a successful farmer and businessman. Only glimpses of the broader family living in harmony under his benevolently firm rule are given outside the main focus on two daughters, Esther and Ruby, both in their late teens. Ruby is beautiful and is favored by adults and youth. Esther is plain but bright and like her father in attitudes, convictions, and demeanor. Ruby is in love with a Canadian Mormon, who is seeking her hand in marriage. Esther and Ruby help plead his cause to their father, and Brother Burton gives his blessing. At a church Gold and Green Ball--a highlight for young ladies--Esther is a wall flower, unnoticed by all the young men. She, however, has designs on Harry Curtis, an eligible bachelor, and she persuades him to take her home after the dance. She gets Harry to propose marriage to her; he receives Brother Burton's blessing, and Harry and Esther are married. Ruby marries the Canadian, and they move to Alberta to his home and farm.

The story from this point on is primarily Esther's. The time shifts to thirty years later when Harry dies suddenly at age fifty. Harry has been a good provider, and he and Esther have had three children and have raised them in Ogden: Hank, Irene, and Burton. Esther has suffered adversity during her marriage. Hank, the older son, rebels from the pressures of living as his mother wants him to live and expects him to live because of his heritage. He leaves to become a man of the world and a lost sinner in the eyes of Esther. Harry, a coarse, animal type, from Esther's point of view, had gradually lost his sanity and died one night in bed. Irene, a beautiful and talented daughter, marries a non-Mormon, Julian, a man Esther abhors because he is an intellectual and because Irene loves him. Additional suffering results from Irene's dying while giving birth to a daughter, Caroline, whom Esther feels she must raise because Julian is unfit to do so.

Esther's last hope is Burton, who has just returned from a church mission to England. However, he, too, adds to her suffering by refusing to marry a girl his mother prefers and by marrying one his mother cannot tolerate. Although Burton, a child of the covenant, struggles to escape the temptations of tobacco, alcohol, and sex, he rebels against Esther's concerned but dominating nature. Finally, he wounds Esther deeply by telling her he is moving to a small town in southern Utah. Esther's life is painful defeat for her, but she is ready to struggle on to care for Caroline, who is now seven years old. Esther is certain, though, that "God hadn't meant" her life "to be this way" (292).

Scowcroft has explained that his second novel, published in 1950 and titled *First Family*, is not autobiographical although in describing himself he admits that "three facts would be important: my family, the twenties and thirties, and the West." The West "was my natural setting" and "the years between 1920-1941 were not only the space between the wars, but the period of my growing up" (author's statement on back cover). The title refers to the most prominent family of a small western town--a rich family financially

but more so as a unit of human experience.

Because the family is what life becomes and means for its members, the story is a character study of the Jack and Harriet Gannon family during the 1920s and 1930s. The narrative begins when the oldest child, named Jack for his father, is preparing to leave home to attend Harvard University. It ends when Gus, the youngest son, prepares to leave college for military training prior to America's entry into World War II. In between, the story line is a complex, detailed, perceptive character study of the nine family members and the interactions among them and others who affect their lives. The characters grow and change and disperse from their fictional Clark City in the Rocky Mountains to other parts of America.

Scowcroft sets his third novel, *A View of the Bay* (1955), in the San Francisco Bay area. The narrative, told in the third person omniscient point of view, is complex in structure, using flashbacks and Faulkner's caterpillar device to leap ahead of the story line then to draw up the back action to fill in the action. This narrative is rich in description of the landscape around the Bay and of the lavish interiors of wealthy people's homes.

The story line centers on Leonard Shaw, a somewhat lost and immature intellectual--reminiscent of a stereotyped Hemingway-style lost-generation sort of character. Leonard learns he is the chief legatee in the will of a former school friend, Craig Robertson. Craig, spoiled and rich, lived a wild, reckless, foolish life and then committed suicide. Leonard meets Audrey, a former associate editor of a magazine Craig was financing, and he learns from her the details of the last ten years of Craig's life since college. Nora Robertson, Craig's older sister whom Leonard had known in his youth and had worshipped because of her beauty, confronts Leonard and says she will contest the will. Leonard is married to a likable, mature woman, Janet, who is expecting their first child; but Leonard is so wishy-washy, so rudderless as he drifts through life that he doesn't appreciate what he has in Janet. Nora offers him herself, money, and Paris if Leonard will give up the idea of inheriting Craig's wealth. Although Leonard is visiting Nora during Janet's labor and delivery of their son, somehow he rejects Nora's offer. He also willingly gives up the inheritance. He finally drifts back to Janet and their son. In flashbacks, the earlier relationships of Leonard's befriending Craig reveal why Craig has designated Leonard in the will.

In Scowcroft's fourth novel, *Wherever She Goes*, published in 1967 twelve years after the third, Scowcroft shows he has mastered his narrative techniques and has achieved a delightful, ironic sense of humor that is present only occasionally in the earlier novels. This charming story is set in and around Madrid and Lisbon. Andrew ("Andy") Huckins, an American, has gone to live in Spain to escape the pain of his wife's death. He chooses Madrid for economy because he has about five hundred dollars left after the expenses of Clara's illness and death from cancer. Andrew, as narrator, reveals his sophistication and knowledge of literature, music, the other arts, philosophy, and religion. His fine sense of humor from



his ironic perception of people, ideas, and events makes his observing and telling pure delight.

He is mainly vegetating until his wealthy sister, Mary Faye Trumbull, who is vacationing in Europe, arrives in Madrid. Andy visits Mary Faye, who is provincial and naive from living in a small town, Fairview, from which Andy has drifted very far away from since his teens. They have a whirlwind vacation in Madrid and Lisbon, visiting the main cultural attractions, staying in lavish hotels, and eating the rich delicacies of the popular and expensive restaurants. Mary Faye, vivacious and considerate, helps Andy come to life and grow in humaneness. The contrasts between them and among other "worldly" characters that they interact with during their vacationing are the heart of the narrative. By the end of the story, Andrew has new direction for his life; and Mary Faye, hardly touched by the "world," goes back to Fairview to be home for Christmas.

For Scowcroft's fifth novel, *The Ordeal of Dudley Dean* published in 1969, the setting shifts to Salt Lake City during a Christmas vacation period of about three weeks. The story is told in first person by Dudley Dean, a college professor of English. He had been granted a year's sabbatical leave to England to write a book, but his wife suddenly divorced him and married a colleague in the English Department. While Dudley was in England, his mother died, leaving him enough money for him to spend another year before going back to teaching. He chooses to spend the year in Salt Lake City where he had grown up and attended school, including graduating with a bachelor's degree from the University of Utah. He had been away for twenty years and wondered what changes had taken place.

Dudley's seventeen-year-old son, Tad, visits him during the Christmas vacation, and the novel recounts their activities during that period. Their relationship is a strained one, and each spends much of his time mainly apart from the other but with other interesting and delightful characters, including some Mormon relatives who are concerned about Dudley's and Tad's souls. The story explores the understanding that Dudley achieves about his son, other characters, and especially himself. Dudley grows as a person and father, and the story ends with his hoping that in some way he can help his son be a better, freer, happier person than he himself has been and is.

Scowcroft's sixth and last novel, *Back to Fire Mountain*, published in 1973, is difficult but interesting. It strongly echoes an Agatha Christie murder mystery--a form that functions as a means for a profound character study of four, late-middle-aged members of a family, their spouses, and the family maid. With the exception of one brother, Harrington, they have returned to their childhood home town, Eden Park, for some mysterious reason that might be related to the family fortune.

A lengthy first part introduces the four characters, recounts their journey to Eden Park, and describes their difficulties in traveling up a canyon to Fire Mountain Lodge where the family has had many important get-togethers. Part 2 covers five days during

which a member of the family dies each day, mysteriously for the others but not for the reader. After each death, the remaining family members think murder has been committed, and the frank conversations they have allow them to share things that they were never able to say to each other earlier in life.

The second half of the novel consists of two flashbacks to the marriages of two characters and the death many years before of a sixteen-year-old sister. Then the story leaps ahead to the journey to the present and the journey to Fire Mountain Lodge and the visit of seventeen-year-old Arnie, whose parents had been among the first to die. Scowcroft uses this latter half to clarify the character of each of the characters and to show how each, according to his or her needs, had created fantasies or illusions about himself or herself and others in order to survive. The story ends suspensefully as Arnie reaches to open the door of the Fire Mountain Lodge. Inside, the reader knows, he will find the bodies of five members of the family and the faithful maid.

### Memorable Characters

Besides being interesting stories, Scowcroft's novels bring to life four memorable characters. Esther Burton Curtis in *Children of the Covenant* is a sympathetic, enduring, yet tragic individual. Growing up under a dominating, polygamous father, she is proud of her Mormon heritage and her father's strength. Esther so admires him that she counsels her sister to marry a man like him. Esther could never see nor say as Ruby does: "I wouldn't marry Father. I wouldn't live the way our mother lived--all those babies and all the work and Father not even knowing she was alive" (14). Esther, in contrast, easily embraces a life centered on keeping the house clean and orderly, having the table full of food, and the house full of babies.

Esther is plain-looking but bright and is overlooked by the boys and young suitors because of Ruby's beauty. For her brothers, life held all kinds of possibilities, but for Esther and her sisters, they could "think longingly of their destiny which, as pictured by their stepmother, looked not too attractive" (4). Esther is unfortunately repelled by sexuality. Verbal suggestions, vulgarity, and sexual feelings are all abhorrent to her. When the oldest sister, Emma, is married, Esther hears "the few hinted, shameful facts about life from Auntie, her father's third wife" (2-3). Esther believes that she "would suffer marriage with dignified resignation" (73). A woman could find dignity in pregnancies because "marriage would be more than lustful cohabitation" (73). Esther sees her husband Harry as a good and kind man but also as a lustful animal taking out his sexual desires on her. She is saddened by his death but in a sense relieved, even pleased by it. Her comfort is her heritage, family, and religion.

Esther is provincial, narrow-minded, anti-intellectual, and dogmatically certain she has the truth. In her eyes she is one of God's chosen people, a pure vessel, and she cannot tolerate those who are not. She has occasional, microscopic doubts about God's

plan for her, but at other times is arrogantly certain of what God has in mind for her. Her main concern for her children is that they will be worthy of their heritage, but she tries too hard and unintelligently to force it upon them. She cannot see that she is at times a stumbling block rather than a stepping stone for them. Her magnanimous heart cannot compensate for her lack of understanding of human nature and life. She unknowingly dramatizes the tragic fact that dogmatism and ignorance bring suffering in this world.

Another woman character, Mary Faye Trumbull, in *Wherever She Goes*, is like Esther in several important ways, but she has the advantages of having wealth and the abundant opportunities it provides. Scowcraft insightfully portrays the broader opportunities that came with living two generations later. Mary Faye is also provincial and naive, coming from a small town and being a conservative, devout believer in religion. She is one in whom there is no guile, generous, extroverted, sensitive, and affectionate with people, animals, and things. She is less dogmatic than Esther, less narrow, and is thus more tolerant. Physically she is attractive but quite fat; she loves food and is a great eater. Andy says of her, "Pounds she had always added, but my sister Mary Faye had never been one to worry much about weight. Talk about weight, yes. Worry about weight, no" (56). Socially she is jovial, attractively personable, enthusiastic, and friendly nearly to a fault. Intellectually she is innately bright, and she writes interesting letters in beautiful penmanship.

She marries a rich, older man when she is thirty, and he dies during their first year of marriage, leaving her a fortune. She has little sense of sexual needs and is extremely naive about sexuality in the "world." Because she is so honest and trusting of others, she can be taken advantage of. She loves doing things for others, especially spending money on them to give them happiness. As Andrew's older sister, she wants to help him in every way she can. She is an unusual and delightful person; and in a child-like way, she marvels at seeing things in a new world for the first time during her tour of Europe.

She is often unrealistic and limited in vision and understanding because of who she is and where she comes from and how long she has been there--in short, because of the training that has given her tunnel vision about religion, people, and life. The most devastating thing about her from Andrew's point of view is that she does things "unconsciously"--not sinfully nor ignorantly, but from training in her earlier life based on indoctrination in values, attitudes, and beliefs she would hardly recognize. Yet her genuine goodness and humaneness is a positive, powerful influence in helping Andrew grow in becoming more honest and human and in striving to improve his life and that of others. Andy gives her the ultimate praise when he says, prior to their parting: "I'd have liked to say thank you, Mary Faye, one last time. Not for anything she had done but for what she was" (233).

Drastically unlike Esther and Mary Faye is April in *The Ordeal of Dudley Dean*. At age twenty, April has not inherited nor developed a sense of sin about sexuality. She not only has no need

of a fig leaf but also no notion of why anyone would want one. She is an uneducated high school graduate, unaware of her unawareness of the many requirements for successful living. She is from a low, middle-class family that has not prized education. Her father, Ralph, comes home from work, eats supper, and spends the evening with Ethel his wife (April's stepmother), watching TV and drinking beer until bedtime. They show little interest in April nor her life. April has a small room in a "small bungalow on a side street off the road to the airport." She works in Salt Lake City of the 1960s as a waitress in a "small, not-too-clean cafe called the Koffee Kup" on State Street.

Physically, April is "somewhat chunky, . . . plump, . . . and sizable of bosom but not too long of thigh" (46). She is truly uninhibited about her body: she can disrobe in front of a man, says Dudley Dean, the narrator, "with as little self-consciousness as she handed out doughnuts at the Koffee Kup" (57). She is from Dudley's point of view--after a romp in bed with her--"Sweet April. Delicious April. With the grip and morality of a clam shell" (57). Dudley thinks she is "absolutely free--not an ounce of shame"; and when he praises her for not being "ashamed" of having intercourse with him, she is offended that he could even think that there was anything to be ashamed of. She believes in the beauty and purity of the body and is pleased with the idea that "what God made is good enough for me" (57). She is frankly and genuinely honest--indeed artless in her unconcern about the reactions of others.

She tries to find happiness and consciously tries to adjust her life according to precepts in a book titled, *Put Your Mind to Work*, by a Reverend Arthur Cable. The essence of the book is that life is what a person makes it and that God gave each person power to be happy (47). April desires to have a good man in her life--a man she can like enough, respect enough, and love enough to marry and be a good companion to. She knows that "a lot of dirty old men" try to pick her up at the Koffee Kup, and she cries about her unfulfilled desires and loneliness. Dudley, aware that many people would see April as a "sexpot," senses and respects her vulnerability. She likes Dudley as an "old friend," and her role in the novel enables Dudley to see his hypocrisy and his weakness to will otherwise, and to understand April, Tad, Hannah, and himself in ways he has not before. Because Dudley realizes that April's job at the Koffee Kup is "a ghastly life for a young girl," he offers to buy her different clothes and he encourages her to further her education so she can get a better job and have a better life (28). He reassures her that there can be a good, young man in her life.

April is moral enough and sensitive enough to recognize that Tad is not ready for sex and will not allow him to make love to her on New Year's Eve. Moreover, she is truly concerned about Tad and his future happiness, and she argues successfully with Dudley, who is planning to take Tad to Europe, not to go with Tad because Dudley's interests and ideas of enjoyment are not Tad's. Thus she possesses the qualities of a natural goodness and a simple wisdom.

A fourth memorable character is Dudley Dean. He is intelligent, imaginative, witty, satirical, earthy, delightful, and

hypocritical but aware of it and working to overcome it. He is sincerely striving to be more honest than he is; he is a concerned, caring, complex human being. Part of his memorableness is his attempt to reconcile the Mormon training of his youth with his intellectual and emotional quest for rationality, freedom, and happiness in his middle years. He is perceptive enough and honest enough to acknowledge value in some of his early training, but he is also sufficiently perceptive, honest, and courageous to escape those aspects of his early training which insult the integrity of his mind and heart and violate the dignity of his soul.

He talks about being "haunted by a sweet and loving woman who had dedicated him to Higher Things" (123). He loves his mother but recognizes that her "purity" left him with a "kind of pernicious distortion" (52-53) marked by shame about the body--the flesh--and sexuality generally. She "was totally relevant to what I was" (105), Dudley laments, but thankfully not of what he came to believe. He quit believing in Mormonism and attending church at age ten, but that was too late to escape the sense of sin and guilt he was "trained to believe in": duty to God and self, never to question facts nor examine assumptions, but always to doubt and question life. He came to realize that his mother lived in a world of assumptions wholly free from doubt and the complexities doubt engendered, and that she lacked frontiers for her energies and the imagination to let her know it. She died at seventy-five without ever questioning life (18-20).

In spite of her kind efforts to give him culture, he was simply appalled at his "total naivete" upon entering college. She had given him hunger for culture, not culture. He had been exposed to first-rate intentions, not first-rate minds. Therefore his actions in college were "to prove myself a pagan" (134).

At age forty Dudley considers himself "muddled" and hopes he can somehow help his son from ending up in the same fix. He blames his wife, Hannah, for her infidelity, divorce, remarriage, and for depriving him of Tad. Yet, he is beginning to understand her, their relationship before and during marriage, and himself. He wants Tad to be "a freer, saner, happier, better man than I had been. I wanted him to have a marriage that worked, loves that brought him joy" (123). He did not want Tad haunted by anyone playing Providence.

By the novel's end, Dudley has grown in understanding and behavior; ironically, he can honestly declare: "Oh, blessed be my Mormon genes, for whatever changes might have occurred within me, I should have always known that you 'earn' your place in heaven and earth" (271).

### Use of Language

What enhances the interesting stories and memorable characters is Scowcroft's delightful, rich language. His best prose finely blends humorous and serious tones; his delightful sense of humor tickles and surprises; his undertones create the flashes of insight which give his novels substance. His observations about life and

situations in the stories rely on his keen grasp of irony--seeing contrasts or antithetical elements in life. His narrative structures and his choices and positioning of characters are mainly the result also of his ironic vision. His language is rich in description, imagery, similes, metaphors, and allusions which charge his stories with meaning. A few examples will illustrate this delightful richness.

The novels have numerous elements of situational irony. Esther wants Burton to marry Liz, but Esther doesn't know that Liz smokes, drinks, and seems quite wild. Hazel has most of the qualities Esther would desire for Burton, but Esther cannot tolerate her. The hope in *First Family* that Jack will attend Harvard and launch a brilliant career dies as he becomes a dismal failure in life. Craig Robertson in *A View of the Bay* has every advantage and opportunity to be successful, yet he commits suicide. In *Wherever She Goes* Scowcroft juxtaposes the events of Ralph, Jed, and Mary Faye; and one simply laughs in hearing Jed and Mary Faye talking about how to solve a sexual problem Ralph definitely does not have. In *The Ordeal of Dudley Dean* Dudley is caught spending New Year's Eve with his Mormon relatives rather than with April, and he simply beside himself thinking that Tad is being initiated into sex by April. In *Back to Fire Mountain* several of the characters are certain murder has been committed and act accordingly--though none has been. The narrator says of Phoebe, the last family member alive at the lodge: "Oh, yes, she was aware of the irony, this protecting of her family with a falsehood when never once has she flinched from announcing the truth about herself" (21).

Scowcroft creates a pleasant balance of characters in each of his novels. In *Children of the Covenant*, Uncle Albert is an earthy, foul-mouthed, yet colorful character, providing needed comic relief in a serious novel. The "slimy," crude, avaricious guide and driver in *Wherever She Goes* and the coarse, sex-crazed Ralph are excellent contrasts to Mary Faye. Best of all character contrasts are Miss Alcorn, Leora, and Elinore, the "antiseptic antiglandular" women in *The Ordeal of Dudley Dean* versus the delicious, natural April. Scowcroft develops his plot nicely so that Dudley Dean's consciousness and person bounce back and forth between the two types.

Scowcroft's descriptions are both vivid and functional: for example, a university student named Spide Hamilton "appeared shirtless, in dirty cords and run-down loafers. A thick mat of blond hair grew in wild profusion in the open spaces of his undershirt, and only the shaved squatness of his face was a fire break to the tangled growth on his head" (*Family*, 304). Scowcroft describes some Christmas holiday shoppers in the same novel: "lady shoppers filled the Golden Pheasant [restaurant] with a babble of tongues, with an abundance of flesh that overhung the small wicker chairs and tortured itself into the restricted confines of booths" (307)

Scowcroft's similes and metaphors are fresh and strikingly vivid. He says of a forty-year-old, shy schoolteacher, Elinore, who is with her eighty-year-old aunt, Miss Alcorn, and Leora Curtis, Miss Alcorn's cousin: "To see her quietly, painfully withdrawn

while her aunts bustled joyously about the little house was like noting one unopened bud of a water lily in a pond of happy jumping frogs" (*Ordeal* 34). Elinore talks excitedly at Christmas time: "Her words rushed out, over the choking and stoppages of her voice, like the words of a stammerer who runs a race against the mutiny of speech" (34). In *First Family*, Jack ages ungracefully: "The traces of the golden boy of Babe's dreams were hard to detect; the beauty and distinction she admired had been traitors to him, deserting at the first sign of fleshiness, of baldness. Now he was the base product, the ordinary citizen of forty" (341). And one religious woman is described as "custard pudding without the vanilla bean--good for one, possibly, but almost unpalatable" (*Ordeal* 89).

Of all the poetic elements in Scowcroft's novels, his allusions are the most abundant and effective in communicating feeling and ideas and in enriching the prose. A complex and powerful one occurs in a conversation about George Meredith's novel, *The Ordeal of Richard Fernal* (a key allusion itself which appears several times in different clothes in Scowcroft's *The Ordeal of Dudley Dean*). Elinore thinks a pair of lovers, Lucy and Richard, "are beautiful." Then she compares them to Romeo and Juliet, arguing their love is "finer and purer and--and more beautiful" than that of Shakespeare's lovers. She extends the analogy to another allusion by saying Lucy "was the First Woman" to Richard--obviously meaning his Eve. And then Richard was "one princely youth" to Lucy and that the remainder of mankind was "all Caliban to her" (38), alluding to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Readers familiar with these literary allusions receive the feelings and ideas associated with those works and thus a keener understanding of Scowcroft's meaning.

In another delightful allusion, Andy buys a new blouse for an attractive woman. After she puts it on, "the difference was incredible. I thought, marveling, 'Good heavens, Eliza Doolittle, you could be transformed'" (*Wherever* 126)!

Some allusions are direct and clear. The character, Thrice, in *Back to Fire Mountain* needs an escape from the reality of three dead bodies in the lodge and thinks of the novels: *An American Tragedy*, *Grapes of Wrath*, and *Main Street*, then comments: "All those dreary depictions of the way things are" (180). When Thrice recovers Pansy's drowned body from the river edge, he talks about removing "a water-logged Ophelia out of the rain" (170). An allusion that reveals Thrice's sense of humor is his description of himself, "I used to be as lean as Cassius, and look at me now, Falstaff" (161).

### Significant Themes

Interesting stories, memorable characters, rich language aid Richard Scowcroft in sharing believable, perceptive experiences about people and life--experiences that call for an enlightened, broad view of life. Although his novels are often humorous--indeed funny, and appropriately satirical given the characters and events, they are also serious and compassionate comments about people,

society, and life. They always assert values and affirm life's purpose and meaning. They are news which will last. Of the numerous ideas and much criticism about life that the novels share, several are worth mentioning.

An important theme in *Children of the Covenant* is the paradox of religious suffering, the possibility that the more religious a person is the greater suffering that individual may experience. For Esther Burton Curtis this is true. At the end of the novel, Esther, facing her painful defeat, feels in her chest "the unbearable weight of acceptance, the desperate cry against defeat" (292). In *A View of the Bay Scowcroft* develops complicated relationships of the characters: Mr. Robertson, Nora and Craig Robertson, Audrey, Leonard, and Janet--who fail to achieve genuine companionship. In a powerful, symbolic scene, Audrey gets wet in a rainstorm and needs warmth. For Leonard, who is part of the scene, the narrator says, "The sum of his night's knowledge was that there is more warmth in human companionship than in wool" (204). From Leonard's observation and experience of the other characters, he comes to understand that "the message of the universe" is not love but "love intelligently given." One theme the novel shares is that without "love intelligently given," no genuine companionship can exist (204-05).

An example of explicit social criticism that develops naturally during the Christmas season in *First Family* occurs in the thoughts of a college student: "Catholics must remember what Christmas is really about-- . . . the rest of us are simply at the mercy of the National Association of Manufacturers--and advertising. We don't worship the birth of a Christ child, but the birth of Business, Free Enterprise" (307-08).

In a humorous but also a serious tone, Scowcroft through the characters and dialogue satirizes some conventional views about sex and religion. A returned missionary in *Children of the Covenant* thinks, "Women put up with men so that there can be children" (81). Esther, the chief architect of Burton's life, finds it hard "to think of her boy--her baby boy--in terms of the repulsive thing that manhood meant" (163). She is however comforted that marriage for Burton will insure "the continuity of good stock . . . upholding the long chain of good that was their inheritance." Dudley Dean's mother had similar views. She was, says Dudley, of the "'grim and bear it' classification in Mormon sexology: For higher claims, woman sacrifices self to man" (125). Two other classifications included the "'pinch and cuddle' category in which sex is considered a real fun game, good for lots of laughs from participants and audience alike." The third category, of which Filmore, the returned missionary, was a fit candidate was the "'receive and rejoice' category in which some lucky girl will be chosen for the gift of the phallus--with a bright red bow attached" (124). Dudley explains that though these categories are different they embrace one principle: "sex as supervised activity." He explains:

In the Mormon bed, God is always there, watching, commenting: You are a fine, pure woman, He says. You are



a clean, strong man. You are good, faithful servants--supplying bodies for all the little souls in heaven who are crying to be born. In a way it is less complex than a relationship between a lone man and woman, because there is always an umpire there. (124)

Dudley refers to sex as the "so-called Apple-Disease" and hopes his son can be saved from it (45). In Dudley's imaginative discussions with Sir Austin Fernald, who was using a system to make the perfect man out of Richard, his son, Dudley argues that Sir Austin failed by keeping Richard away from women. Dudley thinks that by forcing Tad to be with women Tad would learn of his own animality and women's also. The notion of Apple-Disease could then be replaced "with that of Apple-Joy" (127).

Scowcroft loads his stories with the struggle against being provincial. Some characters in his novels function as question raisers, forcing the mind to open rather than to remain closed. Julian, a Gentile and son-in-law to Esther Burton Curtis and father to Caroline in *Children of the Covenant*, in a closing conversation with Esther says:

"I've never objected to Mormonism, really--in fact, I rather like it. You acquire a certain admiration for it. . . . I have objected to some of the latter-day Mormons, some of the zealous old brethren who have nothing to be zealous about. You can't be an evangelist if you've lost your message. The Mormons need a new message, a new cause. And I don't really object even to the busy-bodies; I merely find it surprising sometimes that they can be so serious in their concern over trivialities. (290)

Gus, in *First Family*, is struggling as a college sophomore to know the "why" about many things in life, and he tells another student about some of them. She chastises him for speaking from his "blind little middle-class world, blind and ignorant" (301). Dudley Dean reveals one of "the outstanding lessons" he learned at the University of Utah between ages seventeen and nineteen (note the witty language):

There are some perfectly presentable, admirable, even lovable people in the world who are not Mormons; it is possible to speak to--even be friends with--people whose families did not cross the plains, found the industries, make up the respectable neighborhoods; it is not necessarily true that a member of the Democratic party is of inferior race, nationality, morality, and bodily sanitation; in the world of unequal opportunity, unfulfilled possibility, and uncertain brotherly love, there are crimes against humanity even greater than smoking. (109)

Although the novel *First Family* affirms the power of love in the

lives of family members, it also covers two decades of American history and what the 1920s and 1930s meant for different members of the family; it is also a story about the American West--a small, fictional town, Clark City, in the Rocky Mountains--with its provincialism, narrowness, fears of being found out, and fears of having to change and become part of a bigger country and world. What is true of this small town and many like it is also true of family members having to grow up in their broadening world.

Symbolically, Scowcroft suggests this provincialism theme powerfully in *A View of the Bay*. The literal view is a very tiny one, visible out of a narrow kitchen window only when one stood on tiptoe by the counter. Yet, in viewing the bay on a clear day from a San Francisco hilltop, Leonard is aware of the limitations of sight, even from there, and aware that what one sees is relative because something is always behind the view one sees--more ocean, land, Japan, and the like. The narrator comments: "Of all he saw, only the islands of the Bay looked as if they were meant to stay there: man and his works pass away--was this the message?--only these islands remain" (215). In the scope of the whole novel, Scowcroft could be suggesting the impermanence of an individual's condition and how little of the large view of life can actually be seen.

In *Wherever She Goes*, Mary Faye and Andrew visit museums and view art exhibits that Mary Faye can see only in terms of a mental referent in her memory. She can see in the paintings of El Greco, Velasquez, and Goya only the counterparts of Fairview that are in her memory. In other words, in viewing or experiencing life, we can only "see" what we are. That is why we need to broaden ourselves (100). That is why Andrew has traveled far since age ten from Fairview, which he describes as "a dark tomb with all the oxygen being used up over and over again" (153).

In *Children of the Covenant*, Julian takes his seven-year-old daughter, Caroline, in a car from Ogden to Salt Lake City on a leisurely day trip. At age seven Caroline truly enjoys most of the day and being with her father, whom she has seldom seen. However, Caroline has been so brainwashed by Esther that smoking is an enormous evil that the scent of tobacco on Julian immediately robs her of excitement, replacing it with misery. The tragedy of this is that a hatred of Julian comes along with the feelings. The narrator explains that "hate couldn't exist on such a day as this. Caroline hadn't known that something you loved could be evil" (277). In her mind she can only sit "helplessly by, watching the person slip from your world of settled values into the world of the tramps and bums of lower twenty-fifth street" (278). Although Caroline loves her father "very very much" and although the day spent with him was "the most lovely day of her life--better than any Christmas or birthday, . . . God hadn't meant her to be happy; He had made the instrument of her happiness a man that her grandmother hated. And worse than that, He had made that man someone you wanted to love" (278). Julian understands this; Esther doesn't. Julian's hope as a father is that, though "the will to believe won't change," what people believe in will change. His concern for Esther and those who

might influence Caroline is that they will give Caroline "something worth believing in." He sees the tragedy--if not the folly--that from provincial conditioning Caroline "suffered a major crisis today over something she believes in--she was willing because of a conviction, to deny herself everything a child wants"--to love and be loved by a father (290).

In Dudley Dean's imaginative argument with Sir Austin Fernal about how to raise a son, Dudley fears that his shortcomings and example will be "visited" on Tad. He sees the folly that Sir Austin committed in trying to raise a perfect man. Sir Austin assumed that he was Providence and that he had the wisdom and right to do with Richard's life as he wanted. Dudley, aware of this, says in imagination:

Oh, Sir Austin: Why, instead of repeating your mistakes could I not learn from them? I have known all along that you were wrong. Taddus [Thaddeus, Dudley's grandfather], my mother, both wrong--and why didn't my father ever ask me to come out to the snowy porch while he smoked his filthy cigar? Hannah, Bessie, absolute nuts. All mothers and fathers, insane. Most benighted of them all, Dudley Dean, who for at least thirty years of his life opposes his individuality to the forces that made him and then balks when his son tries to do the same. (270)

Dudley goes to his bedroom and picks up a picture of Tad and then thinks: "This is the realest love I have ever known, and I am sending him off to Europe alone" (271). Dudley is growing and becoming a better human being. He closes his eyes and says, "Although I am made in the image of God, I shall not be Providence to my son" (272).

In brief conclusion, if you want to read interesting stories with memorable characters expressed in rich language, depicting penetrating, broadening experience, read Richard Scowcroft's novels. If you like tongue-in-cheek humor, mirth, mischief, and earthiness along with sensitivity, compassion, spirituality, and wisdom read Richard Scowcroft's novels.

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**THE DESERET BOOK BOOK:**  
**LINDSEY PHILLIP DEW, JACK WEYLAND,**  
**AND CARROLL HOFELING MORRIS**

*Harlow Soderborg Clark\**

Let's suppose for a few minutes that we were trying to create the Deseret Book book. Deseret Book is a popular press. A murder mystery might be nice. There are precious few of those for a Mormon audience, and we could certainly have a chaste detective, an LDS Father Brown—or Bishop Brown. He could also be a defense attorney, a little like Perry Mason—except that this client is guilty. And the only evidence that could convict him was seized illegally, so the bishop plays his part in getting the murderer off. The townspeople begin to boycott his legal practice. Attendance at church drops. One day he goes out to work in the raspberries without gloves. A cousin, concerned about the scratches, asks why, and he replies, "Atoning for my sins with my own blood" (Dew 189). When he is subsequently called into the stake presidency, about thirty members of the congregation get up and leave, rather than vote.

Well, maybe Deseret Book isn't ready for a novel like that. But how about a funny novel about a bishop, especially since, as Bert Wilson has pointed out, the bishop is the center of Mormon humor (8). This bishop is a man who graduated with his doctorate in physics just about the time the bottom fell out of the market for physicists, so he owns a Lawn Doctor franchise and runs an Orange Julius stand. Members of his ward are always hitting him up for free services, but he shows a lot of good humor about it. He also has a recurring fantasy about being interviewed by Barbara Walters. He has several fantasies. He and his wife go off to his twentieth high school reunion, where he meets an old girlfriend whose husband confesses a long-standing affair to him. He indulges in some fantasies about his old girlfriend, until he realizes there's a

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line representing one's willingness to commit adultery, and he's crossed it. Oh, there's also a toothpaste tube used as a phallic symbol in the novel.

Well, all right, maybe Deseret Book isn't ready for a satirical (though hilarious) novel about bishops. How about a cautionary tale about adultery and forgiveness? This is about a woman who's been on a pedestal for years and finally gets off it—but the getting off is horrible: her life becomes a horror to her. Her husband, a perfectionist, doesn't help. Every time he has the prompting to forgive her, he squelches it, reasoning that she hasn't suffered enough. The woman's horror at what she's done yields to a rage at her father and husband, who put her on the pedestal, at the church and culture that build and maintain the pedestal, and finally at God himself. Well, maybe Deseret Book isn't ready for a feminist novel. (Oh, and did I mention, there's a psychologist in the ward who wears a beard to teach the ward members tolerance?)

Well, we seem to be having a little trouble coming up with an adult novel for Deseret Book. Let's try an adolescent novel. This is about a teenage girl, pregnant after years of rape by her stepfather to which her mother implicitly—sometimes explicitly—consented. She's placed in a Mormon foster home in a Mormon town. School starts, and a short time later she begins attending church. She learns that a boy has been spreading utterly vile rumors about her. He's one of the priests at the sacrament table. "Those two guys. Why are they sitting there?" she asks her sister missionary. "They'll bless the sacrament. It's like they're standing in for the Savior. They'll be saying the same prayer he said for his apostles at the last supper." (Sara, 109).

Well, let's see, so far we've covered murder, adultery, grudge-holding, incest, gossip, and blasphemy—unsavory, ironic territory for Deseret Book. Of course, we've also covered repentance and forgiveness: maybe that's enough to redeem these books.

Now, if you've read any of the novels I've been discussing, you might be inclined to point out that theme and plot are not what make a novel great (or even good), and that what I've been discussing is all the stuff of melodrama. Of course, so are the plots of *Crime and Punishment*, *Othello*, *Oedipus Rex*. . . . Theme and plot are also not what define a novel as poor.

In a paper delivered to the Association for Mormon Letters in 1979, Elouise Bell looked at thirty stories submitted to BYU's Mayhew Contest and suggested that the willingness of students to explore complex themes in complex ways is an index to a growing maturity in their writing. (Actually Bell's subtitle uses that sad

word *sophistication*, to paraphrase Lionel Trilling,<sup>1</sup> but in this case that sad word suggests technical mastery rather than sophistry or artificiality.) Bell's paper is a plea to teachers to nurture student writing to further maturity so that when the current crop of writers in their thirties, forties, and fifties is harvested, there will be another crop. Perhaps it is also true that the willingness of a publisher to publish stories with complex or difficult themes says something about the publisher's growing maturity, or, at least, its perception of its audience's growing sophistication.<sup>2</sup>

So I'd like to spend some time exploring some novels published by that most conservative (near-canonical in some minds) of Mormon presses, Deseret Book, and wonder at what their publication suggests about Mormon attitudes toward fiction and, more importantly, towards satire.

The first novel, Lindsey Phillip Dew's *The Trial*, I read in spite of Deseret Book's ad campaign, which made it sound like an extreme right-wing attack on a legal system which lets criminals go free on technicalities. Instead, what we have in Bishop John Lindsey (named for the author's grandfather) is a modern-day Enos telling us of the struggle he had before the Lord to resolve a trial in his life—a man trying to make sense to himself (and to us) of why the guilty sometimes go free, of why obedience sometimes produces greater evil than good, of why good people sometimes compromise themselves, of why good people accuse each other of evil.

The second book, Jack Weyland's *The Reunion*, I also read a bit reluctantly. Weyland has a wonderful satirical sense, but he often pulls his punches. For example, his story "Punch and Cookies Forever" starts out with plenty of punch but soon throws in the towel. Greg Jeffreys, the narrator is a college senior who only comes to church once a year—the opening-of-school get-together. "Hi

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<sup>1</sup>"The class of New York Intellectuals is not remarkable for what it originates, and perhaps it says something about its nature that an eminent member of this class, an intelligent and eager-minded younger critic could recently have found it possible to publish a volume of critical essays in which the sad word *sophisticated* was repeatedly used as a term of praise" (Trilling, ix.)

<sup>2</sup>Maybe it also says a great deal about the ingenuity of writers working within censorship at getting around the correlators. This is a theme worth exploring. I don't know to what extent Deseret Book books are correlated, but the perception is widespread that anything published by the Church is. At the Rocky Mountain Writer's Convention, circa 1982, Jack Weyland said as part of a panel that he had certain reservations about submitting any more stories to the *New Era*: They had bought so many of them, and so many were still unpublished, that he wondered if they would buy anymore. Orson Scott Card responded by saying something like, "Oh, they censor you, too, huh?"

there. I'm Brother Johnson. I don't believe I've met you. Are you a freshman?"

"No, I'm a senior. I came to this cookie dunking last year and you asked me the same thing then." (24)

Greg's father is a counselor in a stake presidency, who neglects his family for his church duties. In the course of the story, Greg comes to realize that his father is not responsible for his inactivity, that he has to be responsible for his own inaction. So I suppose this is a coming-of-age story. But if Greg is responsible for his own inactivity, his father is also responsible for his neglects. The story never acknowledges this. It's as if there never were really any problem, except with Greg. All that would be necessary for great improvement would be a scene, or just a few lines, where Greg forgives his father, or repents to his father for judging him harshly. (In all fairness, Weyland once told me this was the first story he wrote.)

In *The Reunion* Weyland handles this situation with much more honesty and depth. Eric Turner, the third-person protagonist, struggles through most of the novel with the sense of failure and unrealized potential that a doctor in physics might feel who is spending his life selling orange juice. He gradually comes to accept his own accomplishments but then learns he is to be released as bishop, again triggering his sense of failure. After he has expressed this feeling to his wife, Janice, she says,

"Eric, I have a little confession to make[.]" . . .

"What?"

"I've been praying for you to be released as bishop."

"Why?"

"I couldn't see how I was going to manage with another baby without you at home to help."

"But you've never complained."

"You had enough problems to deal with. I'll tell you the night I started to pray for your release from being a bishop. It was a few weeks ago, after the Pine Wood Derby at Cub Scouts. Do you remember? All the other fathers worked with their sons to carve the cars and paint 'em. But you came home the same day of the race, and, between phone calls, knocked out something for Brent. His was the only car there with wet paint. I remember it left a little paint trail down the slope. It came in last. Brent was so embarrassed about it. He cried that night and asked why Dad never helped him in Cub Scouts. I told him you were too busy, and he asked, 'Too busy for me?'"

"I never knew," Eric said. "He cried about it?"

"That night he did. Some boy told him his car looked like cow manure."

"Cow manure?"

"Yes."

"The color or the design?"

"He didn't say."

Eric sat down on the bed. "Cow manure."

She sat down beside him.

"I love you very much, Eric."

"And I love you. I'm sorry if I haven't been the kind of husband I should have been. It seems like for the last four years, I was always hurrying out the door. Well, things will be different now. I promise I'll be a full-time husband and father. I'll change diapers. Even the messy ones." (138-39)

The third novel, Carol Hofeling Morris's *The Broken Covenant*, is much the richest, most complex and sustained of the novels under consideration. I have mentioned elsewhere the ideas of Marden Clark and Terry Eagleton on value (H. Clark 1994). Eagleton, a Marxist, argues that works of art gain their value because of, not in spite of, their limitations. A novel which exerts a great deal of energy against its boundaries, which moves and flexes against its limitations, and therefore reveals clearly the nature of the society which produced it, gains value to the extent that it exerts this kind of energy. For Marden Clark, a Latter-day Saint, limitations also generate value—but the struggle is more joyous: a way of finding out what we can do within a form, rather than a way of breaking loose of limits or wishing for that millennial day when we won't have to struggle against our limits. For Clark, limits are something eternally valuable, eternally value-engendering, a word he loves to quote from Chaucer: "Of which vertu engendered is the flour."<sup>3</sup> If books are valuable because of how they push at their limits, perhaps publishing houses are valuable—able to give value—based on how willing they are to publish books that push at certain limits.

But I mention Clark and Eagleton for another reason. Their positions in some ways parallel the positions of two characters in this novel. Robert Montgomery, the husband, and his Aunt Emma. Robert, a perfectionist, see his limits as weaknesses, things to

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<sup>3</sup>Line 4 of the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. (Marden Clark, "Virtue.") It is worth mentioning that Eagleton's ideas on value come from *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: NLB, 1976) about how to use Marxist critical principles to explore the ideological aspects of literature. Ideology is a concept very close to the concept of rationalization. Just as people may make complex rationalizations for their sins (the sinning husband and wife in *The Broken Covenant* certainly do), so a society can develop a complex web of institutions, ideas, and justifications to hide from itself its essentially oppressive nature. This web is called ideology. Clark's ideas, on the other hand, come from a sacrament meeting talk suggesting joy in such restrictions as fasting and tithe-paying. He is not using the concept of limits to establish value till such time as the work is finished and we can be free of limits. Rather, he is (implicitly at least) appealing to people who are thinking of leaving the Church (and to those who aren't) to take up the yoke—a liberating limitation—and walk in it with the Savior.



overcome. He has gained considerable value through his strivings to overcome—a good income, the title of chief financial officer of a large corporation, a seat on the high council, and a model family—but his life is joyless. "That's not too much to ask from someone whose ancestors crossed the plains," is his personal and family motto. Reflecting on this, he remembers his thought as a boy, "It made life simple: there were not many choices for someone whose ancestors had crossed the plains!" (72-73)

His Aunt Emma, on the other hand, though she lives on the family ranch is far less ascetic than her husband or his brother and sister-in-law. They see her as worldly; and if they are meekly trying to inherit the earth, she is one of "the fat things of the earth" promised to the faithful, but rejected by them, like the little stone the builders rejected, which grows fat to fill the whole earth, and give it a new name. She takes joy in her limitations and suffers them with good humor, at one point showing Robert her fingers, gnarled by arthritis for decades but now healed by plastic joints. But her eyes are failing, so she still can't do the needlepoint she loves.

Now it may seem that I'm suggesting these characters are embodiments of various attitudes toward the Church. They are more like characters in a parable: Robert, the Prodigal Son, Emma the parent who watches with sorrow his departure, and takes joy in his return. Both *The Trial* and *The Broken Covenant* skillfully retell parables and, as such, are part of the tradition Shakespeare follows in *Measure for Measure* when he retells the parable of the king who goes into a far country, leaving his steward in charge. Both novels deal with traditions, how they affect people and how people deal with a break in tradition or with the discovery that a tradition has more ill effects than good.

The fourth novel in this essay, Jack Weyland's *Sara, Whenever I Hear Your Name*, also belongs to a tradition. Like "Punch and Cookies Forever," it is a coming-of-age story, and its opening paragraphs pay homage to all those movies like *Splendor in the Grass* or *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* that end with a chance encounter between two adults who shared a teenage romance:

When Travis was fifteen years old, Sara came to live next door. Life has never been the same for him since then.

Ten years have passed since their first summer together, and yet even now she appears in his dreams and he sees her again the way she was then, in jeans and sneakers, her hair like scattered sunlight. In the morning after one of those dreams he is haunted by her memory, and he wonders what it would be like to see her again, but of course he knows that is not possible now.

Gradually he has come to understand that what they shared was too fragile to survive in the adult world. And so, for him now, all that is left of Sara is his memories. (1)

This statement has an interesting effect on the novel. It is part of a tradition of openings which includes novels like *They*

*Shoot Horses, Don't They?* and *Looking For Mister Goodbar*, where telling the ending at the beginning of the story gives the story a sense of inevitability. But Weyland establishes early on that these are not doomed characters, so the opening paragraphs act as a way of suggesting the struggle of a man in his mid-twenties to understand and evaluate the defining event of Travis's adolescence.

There's another reason for putting this statement first: It's not really the end of the story. Travis and Sara are not, as I said, doomed characters, and Weyland wants to emphasize something else at the end. This is, after all, the defining event of his adolescence, not of his whole life. He's not stuck in his teens like the ball team in *That Championship Season*. This is a divine comedy, not a picture of hell—Sue Paxman reading the poems of her father, Clinton F. Larson, a novel about healing and growth. All four of these books are about healing and growth—but not simply about the soul's ability to heal itself, or even the power of the universe to heal. They are about the power of God's love—especially as that love is made manifest in and through other people—to heal and bring growth.

I mention this in connection with Jack Weyland because it was his work that first made me aware of the need for Mormon writers to treat spiritual experiences with the same type of frankness contemporary writers generally use to treat sexual and other sensual experiences. I say *sensual* instead of *physical* because for Latter-day Saints spirit is not non-matter, and spiritual experiences are, often as not, sensual—whether the sense involves the eyes that see a vision, the ears that hear the word of the Lord, the head and hands that touch in comforting, healing, blessing, the nose that smells the blessings of God, the mouth that savors the doctrine of the kingdom, or the bosom that burns continually but is never consumed.

Though the burning in the bosom may suffice to express the fullness of our hearts in sacrament meeting, it doesn't serve well in fiction. Hence my rather condescending response to Weyland's "The First Day of Forever" when I read it in the *New Era* on my mission was that sometimes a mediocre writer can better make us aware of a problem in aesthetics than a very good writer who solves the problem with such elegance that we don't even notice it—in this case the problem of choosing an effective fictional vocabulary for describing experiences of the spirit. "The First Day of Forever" is about a couple who run off a snowy road on their wedding night. They are rescued by an old embittered man grieving for his son. The groom ends up teaching the old man and his wife about the resurrection, and his bride feels the sweet witness of the Spirit conveying the truth of his words to the old couple.

It didn't bother me that the story is a little far-fetched. How near-fetched, after all, is a story about a little baby abandoned on a hillside and rescued and raised by a farmer? As a young man, hearing a prophesy that he will kill his father and marry his mother, he leaves the farmer, and gets into a brawl with a man who just happens to be his father and kills him, then marries a woman who just happens to be his mother. I suppose what bothered

me about Weyland's story was a certain lack of irony. A couple unable to proceed with their wedding night because the Lord needs them to preach the gospel to someone is a marvelous premise for a comedy. To treat such a situation without acknowledging the comic potential of the sexual tensions, without looking at the irony and gaining energy from it, is to deny the full potential of the story, to pull punches in the same way "Punch and Cookies Forever" does. And in fact, in *The Reunion* Weyland does play this premise for its comic potential. Every time Janice puts on the nightie Eric has bought her, someone knocks on the door of their hotel room with a serious problem.

In *Sara, Whenever I Hear Your Name*, Weyland is dealing with the same theme as in "The First Day of Forever," the ability of "the pleasing word of the Lord" to heal our wounds and griefs. I have mentioned the scene where Sara finds out that the boy who has been making up rumors about her is the priest officiating for the Savior at the sacrament table. This is the kind of counterbalancing irony I longed for in "Punch and Cookies Forever," and "The First Day of Forever," and Weyland handles it with great skill. By counterbalancing irony I mean that the didactic element in what Sara's missionary tells her about the importance of the sacrament is counterbalanced by a reality that is incommensurate with what has just been said. This kind of counterbalancing irony is important in Mormon fiction, because it is difficult to convey certain aspects of Mormon life, particularly the tendency to talk about the gospel, without it. Humor and irony are tools a writer uses to suggest that what is happening is a conversation, not a sermon.

This is a rather unusual definition of irony, which is usually thought of as a subversive element. The priest's viciousness could be said to undercut the importance of what the missionary tells Sara, but that is not how this scene functions. There is no sense that the ward, either as ecclesiastical structure or as body of believers, condones or even knows about his actions. The irony of the scene is directed not at the sacrament but at the unworthy officiator.

In saying that irony (and by implication satire) is a complementary rather than subversive element, I realize I'm going against a very long tradition. As if that weren't arrogant enough, I'm about to suggest that part of the promised restoration of all things is a restoration of the proper function of irony and satire and that Latter-day Saint writers are some of the instruments of that restoration. I'm about to suggest that satire is an act of religious worship.

Consider for example three of Joseph Smith's answers to frequently asked questions:

First—"Do you believe the Bible?"

If we do, we are the only people under heaven that does, for there are none of the religious sects of the day that do.

Second—"Wherein do you differ from other sects?"

In that we believe the Bible, and all the other sects

profess to believe their interpretations of the Bible, and their creeds.

Third—"Will everybody be damned, but Mormons?"

Yes, and a great portion of them unless they repent and work righteousness. (Smith 119)

Or consider this excerpt from Parley P. Pratt's "A Dialogue between Joseph Smith and the Devil," in which the devil proclaims his Christianity:

There is not a more religious and pious being in the world than myself, nor a being more liberal minded. I am decidedly in favor of all creeds, systems and forms of Christianity, of whatever name and nature; so long as they leave out that abominable doctrine, which caused me so much trouble in former times, and which, after slumbering for ages, you have again revived; I mean the doctrine of direct communication with God, by revelation. (335-36)

Or consider this minister and missionary joke, where the minister asks in a debate:

"Do Mormons believe in the gifts of the Holy Spirit?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do Mormons believe in the words of the Lord that if his servants drink any poisonous thing it will not harm them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then will you prove your faith by drinking this vial of poison?"

"No, sir. But I will tell you what I will do. You drink the poison and I will bring you back to life."<sup>4</sup>

Or consider Elder Boyd K. Packer's anecdote:

We were discussing some time ago the music and musicians of the Church, when one of the Twelve pointed out that it may be difficult to get instruction across because some of our musicians, among others, have a tendency to be temperamental. "Yes," observed one of the senior members of our Quorum. "More temper than mental." (4-5)

Elder Malcolm Jeppsen used to paste over the cigarette ads in the magazines in his waiting room with the following statement:

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<sup>4</sup>This story, which Wilson told me is comparatively rare in Mormon folklore, is obviously related to numerous other folktales in which a Mormon missionary bests a supposedly sophisticated minister. He relates the story in his "The Seriousness of Mormon Humor."

Many of the ads in this magazine are misleading, deceptive and are rip-off. For example, smoking does not make one glamorous, macho, or athletic. It does make one sick, poor, and dead. (44-45)

What interests me about these examples is that the first came from the Prophet, the second from an apostle, the third I first heard in a sacrament meeting talk, and though the fourth offended many in attendance and not in attendance at the fireside where it was made, I know of no one who didn't delight in the general conference talk in which Elder Jeppsen read his parody. And, of course, many LDS readers of Jorge Luis Borges will recognize, from their sacred liturgy, a highly satirical context for these words from "The Aleph:"

How then can I translate into words the limitless Aleph, which my floundering mind can scarcely encompass? Mystics, faced with the same problem, fall back on symbols: to signify the godhead, one Persian speaks of a bird that is somehow all birds; Alanus de Insulis, of a sphere whose center is everywhere and circumference is nowhere. (26)

In short, this discussion is not about whether satire ought to be part of our worship but about the fact that it is.

Now for the polemic part of the paper. What has all this to do with four interesting but probably not-all-that-great novels? Deseret Book hardly enjoys a highbrow literary reputation. I hope I've suggested that there is something in each of these novels to raise a few eyebrows. My title suggests that these novels share something that makes them Deseret Book books rather than, say, Signature signatures. I thought when I started writing the paper that that something would be a strong didactic element in each of the novels, but the common element that seems much more important now is the presence of satire. It is not some great anomaly that Elouise Bell, who writes sharp, almost caustic satire like "The Meeting," also writes didactic fiction for the *New Era*. Satire does not necessarily represent the rejection of the thing satirized.

Harold Bloom attempts in *The Book of J* to recover for us the writings of a woman of the post-Solomonic court whose stories were censored and parcelled out to form the basis of many of the stories in the books of Genesis and Exodus. Because her stories don't have a worshipful aura about them, because her Jahweh is very much like a human being and very much unlike the wholly other being that our creeds and philosophies and theologies describe, Bloom says that J was not a religious writer, and he rejects the people who censored her because she wasn't. I suspect that a great deal of Mormon satire arises from an opposite impulse: we don't reject the stories of J as non-religious, we reject and mock the philosophies of men and women that define her stories about Jahweh as unreligious. But if J believed the stories she was writing, then the writing was an act of worship, no matter how ironic the portrait of Jahweh that

emerges.

The censoring of J, the judging of her to be nonreligious, seems to me an example of what happens when a culture refuses to take seriously its literary tradition—whether it considers that tradition to be inferior or blasphemous. I keep hearing people say things like, "Mormondom has yet to produce a great novel," or "We've yet to produce a great novelist." I keep wondering if we're really saying we haven't produced a critically popular novelist or a novelist widely read outside Mormon culture, or even if we're saying we haven't produced a critic who will take Mormon literature seriously. Think of your favorite novelist. Is she or he a great novelist? How do you know? All of us have had the experience of discovering a great novelist, that is, without being told, this is a great novelist. I was directed to most of the literature I call great by someone who cared deeply enough about it to consider it as though it were great literature and deserved to be seriously considered. They, in turn, were introduced to that literature by someone who loved it and loved to share it. One of the reasons I wrote this paper is that in my last quarter of graduate school I found myself in a class where we read and discussed as a serious work of art Susanna Rowson's eighteenth-century, didactic, sentimental novel, *Charlotte Temple: A Tale of Truth*. As an undergraduate, I would have not read the novel or would have passed it off as a historical oddity, a young nation's first big bestseller. But I learned a lot from taking it seriously and began to wonder what a serious treatment of some Mormon popular novels might yield.

This past summer I had the pleasure of doing some editorial work with my mentor, colleague, and friend, Marden Clark, on his book of essays, *Liberating Form*. One passage keeps coming to mind from his intellectual autobiography, "Toward a More Perfect Order Within: Being the Confessions of an Unregenerate, But Not Unrepentant, Mistruster of Mormon Literature." The title suggests not only the dime novels popular during Clark's childhood but also an essay about literary snobbery, about the consequences of not taking our literature seriously. "I grew up literarily," Clark says, "when an accusation of provincialism was greatly feared" (147). I keep wondering if it's at all accidental that the time period he refers to with words like *accusation* and *fear* was the McCarthy period and if McCarthyism isn't somehow one of the consequences of refusing to take our literature seriously? Clark talks at length about this literary atmosphere then makes an observation and poses a question that keeps drawing me back to itself:

I had always argued that one could not understand modern American literature, which I have taught regularly, without understanding Puritan literature. And it doesn't take much acuteness to recognize that one has to approach early Mormon literature with something of the attitude one approaches early American literature with. But not with the condescension of "this is fine, given the situation they were in, fine, given the struggle for

survival and growth in a new land." Why not simply "Fine"? Fine expressions of that struggle. Fine explorations of it. That is what I recognized Puritan literature to be, even if a bit condescendingly. That is what I now recognize early Mormon literature to be. And without any condescension except, perhaps, for some of the wilder flights or barren stretches of Orson Whitney or some of the less happy moments in Eliza R. Snow. (154)

Does the same observation apply to contemporary Mormon literature? Are there any fine expressions of our struggle? I would hardly be the first critic to suggest that too careful—and oh, that's a lovely word in this context, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things" (Luke 10:41)—that too careful attention to another literary tradition may blind us to the value of our own growing tradition. At least I guess that's the moral of all those stories I keep hearing about Emily Dickinson and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and Melville's struggles for an audience, and Poe not really being appreciated until the French Symbolists took it upon themselves to explicate and love him.<sup>5</sup> Clark continues:

We hardly have to affirm that everything we find back then is great, or even good. What we can affirm, without apology or condescension, is that there is much that speaks to profound levels of our spiritual, moral, and esthetic senses, much that defines movingly what the restored gospel meant to those early Mormons, much that is fine indeed. (154-55).

I believe that this comment applies as much to contemporary Mormon Literature as to the early stuff. If I might refer back to *The Broken Covenant* for a moment, a certain unregenerate (but not unrepentant) mistruster of home literature who, in ten years as a bishop, saw not a few troubled marriages said, "It's a painful novel. I hate to say it, but she captures this all so well you almost believe she had to have lived through it."

I believe that our culture, both past and present, has produced many fine expressions of our struggles, but we will have

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<sup>5</sup>Lest you think this kind of nonappreciation of greatness ceased with the nineteenth century, let me tell you a story. *The Pushcart Prize*, Vol. 8 reprinted Raymond Carver's story "A Small, Good Thing." The introduction stated that Carver had felt impelled by the maturing demands of his art to revise a story that was already well-known. One day Tess Gallagher told us what really happened. The story in question was first published as "The Bath," in a publication edited by Gordon Lish. Lish had thought the story not nihilistic enough and had made Carver change it. When Carver decided to publish the uncensored version of the story, rather than embarrassing Gordon Lish, he said he had revised it.

to treat our literature seriously to find them. I also believe, strongly, as many of you know, that it is a mistake to divorce the critical act from the creative, so I will close by reading some short sections from a long story called "Bedpans and Pizza."

This is a story about two missionaries who have grown very close and are sure a transfer is imminent. Their names are Cefyn Hunter and Eden Gardner, names that reflect my desire to have obvious symbolism, almost to the point of allegory, and yet concealed in plain sight. In the first section they're out tracting.

"Well, there's that bumper sticker again," Cefyn said as a car went by, "'I found it.'"

"I saw a car up in Rochester, the bumper sticker had a Star of David on it. Said, 'We Never Lost It.'"

"I know the answer to that one," Cefyn said. "John the Baptist, head in his hands, saying, 'I Lost It.'"

"OK, Moroni saying, 'I restored it.'"

"Laman and Lemuel saying, 'We ignored it.'"

"You got me on that one," Elder Gardner said. "Let me think a minute."

At the end of the block they came to the "Elmira Evangelical Bible Baptist Church. Fundamental. Pre-Millennial. Spirit-Preaching." Elder Hunter read. "What does Pre-Millennial mean?"

"I don't know. It has something to do with when you believe the millennium is going to occur. This is the last days, there will be a terrible tribulation, then the Rapture. You know, 'Warning, in case of Rapture this car will be unoccupied.'"

"You know the image that bumper sticker always conjures up for me?" Elder Hunter said. "All these drivers in the ecstasy of rapture stepping on their gas pedals and then all these unoccupied cars barreling into other cars causing immense havoc and loss of life, and all these enraptured drivers floating up in the air chanting, 'Not perfect, just forgiven,' and shaking their fingers at all those who didn't get themselves saved. Something terribly unsympathetic about that."

"Something a little scary about the Rapture—something very intense. The Holy Ghost is intense and intimate. It's like that joke about praying this morning. I think sometimes I do say to the Lord, 'It's too much. I can't take all this joy. It's just too much.' I worry that something really profound will happen to me if I pray intensely enough. . . Well, maybe not."

When the elders get home for lunch, the transfer is not in the mail.

"That everything?" Elder Gardner asked.

"Yeah. The transfers didn't come. Disappointed?"



"I was sure they were going to, as sure as you were."

"When you get close," Elder Hunter said, "that's when the transfers come."

"I know. I've been preparing myself for it, too. You know, I keep thinking of Abraham . . . how bad he wants that son. All that three days' journey to Moriah he's preparing himself to raise the knife and strike quickly so his son doesn't suffer. Psychically, he's been separating himself from his son. And then the angel comes and says, 'Don't do it.' I suppose he just about went after that angel with his knife."

"Either that, or he tried to wrestle him to the ground. The record keepers, they left that part out. They wanted to save it for Jacob."

They were silent for a few moments. "So," Elder Hunter asked, "do you want to call Pres and yell at him?"

"No, but when the AP's come through next month, we'll throw them in a snow bank. We should have some by then."

The elders have a long discussion over lunch, and as they are heading out the door, Elder Gardner suggests another bumper sticker:

"Hey, here's one. Mahonri Moriancumr saying, 'I saw it.'"

"Coriantumr saying, 'I whacked it off.'"

"That could be taken two ways," Elder Gardner said.

Cefyn blushed. "I guess it could," he said, laughing with embarrassment.

As they got into the car, Elder Gardner said, "God, saying, 'I created it.' Top that one. Top God."

"That's not cheating fair. Who can top God?"

"Jacob. As you'll recall, it was God who had to cheat to get out of that one. Talk about illegal wrestling holds."

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## STRANGE LOVE: THE STORIES OF PHYLLIS BARBER

Helen B. Cannon\*

Because I've been asked to do a fair amount of book reviewing lately, I've had reason also to do some soul searching about the reviewing process itself. For some time now I've had in mind that I should go back to one of my own reviews--should step outside it in a self-conscious way to review my own review, play critic to myself the critic. In current academic gibberish, I wanted to do something metatextual to one of my own reviews, which sounds either esoterically profound or slightly obscene. And if I want to throw words around, I could say it also sounds distinctly omphalic, which I think means a good deal of navel contemplation.

But I hope my concern extends beyond the self-reflexive to certain larger observations about necessary constraints on the literary review as a subgenre. At any rate, my recent review of Phyllis Barber's short story collection, *The School of Love*, presented itself to me as a candidate for couch analysis because it is a review I've wanted to be especially good and true. The essay as I wrote it for *Dialogue* was as honest as I could make it. I had even fought against initial heavy-handed editing that changed my emphasis, insisting that I had written it as I thought it must be.

I still am not ashamed of what I have written, and I have felt further vindicated in my stubbornness by a generous letter of approbation from the author herself. After the review appeared in the Winter 1990 issue of *Dialogue*, Phyllis Barber, whom I've never met but someday hope to, wrote a letter of praise and approval, concluding with words any reviewer would, as the expression goes, kill to hear. "I feel very connected with you at this moment," she wrote,<sup>1</sup> and I felt my bliss.

Yet even considering all this, there are things about my analysis of Barber's book that bother me. I think my dissatisfaction has something to do, as I've said, with the rewards and constraints of the literary review, which takes on a life of its own as it moves from mere reportage to literary essay. Don't get me wrong. The essay review is the form that I aspire to write; it is

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<sup>1</sup>Barber, Letter to Cannon, 11 December 1990.

the sort of critical essay that I love to read. At its best the essay review has a permanence and universality beyond bland, formulaic, say-nothing hype or fashionable criticism. Ideally it has something larger to say beyond the work it examines. It speaks not only to a literate, demanding group of readers, but to the reviewed authors themselves. At its best it makes writers and reviewers "connected" in the craft.

That sort of connection is of the essence. Critic Joseph Epstein, defending the literary review against those who claim that reviews are "parasitic upon more creative genres" counters that ideally an author can benefit from the "carefully considered criticisms and, one hopes, appreciations of those men and women whose literary intelligence one truly respects--one's peers, in the old and fine sense of the word" (34). Writers and reviewers as peers in the art of writing--there is the challenge, but there is also the rub. The literary essayist, conscious of craft and seeking theme and center, sometimes ends up using Procrustean tactics, lopping off or adding on as the mythical Procrustes did his unfortunate guests to make them fit his bed. The Procrustean critic will stretch or sever in order to make a book fit a preconceived critical pattern or to achieve literary polish or even, given the realities of the world of publishing, to fit a prescribed length or word-count. As Virginia Woolf observed in an essay/review of her own, "Beauty and courage are dangerous spirits to battle in a column-and-a-half."

I don't like to think of myself as Procrustean; furthermore, I like to believe that as a critic I stand outside of all the reified, if not mutilating, -isms. Minimalism, modernism, post-modernism, neo-fabulism, avant-gardism, symbolism, Dadaism, existentialism, post-Freudianism--all of those narrowing, constricting, arbitrary constructs I never consciously employ in my reviewing process--and the inflated claims of deconstructionism and the academic vogue of structuralism quite frankly bewilder me. Virginia Woolf wrote reviews for someone she visualized as the "Common Reader," who was, in fact, herself. This reader, she said, "differs from the critic and the scholar. . . . He reads for his own pleasure rather than to impart knowledge or correct the opinions of others. Above all he is guided by an instinct to create for himself, out of whatever odds and ends he can come by, some kind of a whole" (1).

Woolf's common reader by today's unfortunate reading standards is not common at all but rather highly informed, perceptive, and aggressive in reading habits. I aim to be a critic of that sort, writing for readers who demand of me as reviewer a certain integrity, with style and substance beyond journalistic flair and semiotic chatter, readers who want me to be a critic not fettered by fashionable literary theory or by professional academic jargon. If I were to label Barber's stories as post-modern, for instance, would I be advancing for the common reader an understanding of her work? In truth, even if I wanted to, I think I could not approach her book solely as, say, a feminist, or a Marxist, or a regionalist, or a neo-realist critic. I further confess that Levi-Strauss

confounds me and that Jacques Derrida leaves me cold. And even before the murky days of structuralism and deconstructionism, I tended to eschew labels and formulae. I cannot remember ever proclaiming a work a "classic" or even calling one "lasting" or "sublime."

But if these -isms and labels do not inform my reviewing process, my sense of form and style do. Maybe in the very abandoning of guiding abstractions, I have become slave to my own essay-writing standards. I require of myself an informing theme; I want beginnings; I want endings. My own reading tastes and background enter in, informing my understanding (and if that is the unconscious deconstructionist in me, so be it). Probably, too, like medical students who always think they are suffering from the disease they are presently studying, I read my own life predicaments and sadnesses in. But part of the beauty of the essay form is that it gives me permission to inject and overlay. Carried to the extreme, an essay/review may scarcely even mention the book it purports to analyze. Paul Halmos, a fine mathematician and a very good writer, served as book review editor for a mathematics journal for a number of years. He wanted to do for mathematicians what the *New York Times Book Review* does for literature, keeping readership in touch with modern mathematics in the way literary reviews inform readers of modern culture. Halmos told his reviewers that "they may, but need not, express value judgments." In fact, he went so far as to tell them that "except in a courtesy paragraph somewhere near the end they need hardly even mention the book." Their aim, he said, was "to keep readers in touch with modern mathematics and its growth, not to tell facts about a book" (375).

So the review can get away--can become separate and its own creature, as these comments do now unless I get specific. Consider, then, my original treatment of Phyllis Barber's story, "Tangles."

The nymphet child, Alice, sleeps with her teddy bears--palpable bears of gray and brown and white. The white bear even has a music box inside. And Alice's father is real enough too--no dream daddy at all, but one who types and scolds and gives advice, and whose balding head Alice kisses. What of the figures who are less certainly real? There is the man who follows her home from schools and who reappears at various points in the story. He wants to touch her golden hair, to braid it, she thinks, into a cord and to lead her away. This man with "yolky" eyes, what part of him is real, what part nightmare, what part a girl's surreal conception of the men her father says "only want one thing?" Is he archetype or actual: sinister or holy? One moment (in dream or in reality) the man narrows his unnatural eyes to scream "Respect for the man," the next moment he is kissing Alice's cheek, kneeling holily and whispering "Love one another," and then, Christlike, lifting her up while reassuring her, "Be not afraid" (22).

Here is a girl on the brink of sexual love, fright-

brushes the taboo; here Barber touches an archetypal issue not likely to be talked around or written up in the *Ensign*. Yet I believe Barber has found a way to suggest an important human truth. Little girls often do want to love their fathers, do search for father figures in lovers, do try to help fathers who fail.

Opening up my original review where it was true enough but constipated, on another go-round I would examine at least three of the stories in the collection that explore the father/daughter motif. In "Silver Dollars," it is more than motif; it is integral. Any daughter who has watched helpless as a father fails would understand. This teen daughter, Mary, loves her father, but begins to see his frailty, sees him as shabby in the midst of Las Vegas glitz, with Mario the millionaire as his foil. My own father was an alcoholic. He was a salesman. He loved to give; but in the end, he was penniless and unable to give. I was his daughter. I used to dream recurrent dreams of buried treasure. I understand "Silver Dollars" though I cannot explain it discursively. Barber speaks in her letter to me of "a heart that understands--that place where words can't really go."

Barber's stories lead us to those wordless centers. Raymond Carver often wrote about inarticulate characters. They suffered their plights. The reader saw them in their extremity. They were characters without the words they needed--children who saw parents' follies but were helpless to comment, drinking men who felt and yearned but could not say, married partners who hadn't the words wherewith to heal but only barbed and angry street language to hurl at one another. Any daughter who has loved a father--who has tried to save a father--would understand. There is a helpless poignancy here. The daughter whose father has been her hero comes to see his frailty:

His bones are small; They could snap and crumble. . . .  
I wish he could come home at nights with his pockets full  
of silver dollars. He'd be happy jingling them. They'd  
bounce off his right leg and my dad would smile and dance  
to the music they made. He'd lift his arms like a Latin  
dancer, ruffles on his sleeves, and he'd samba into the  
kitchen and flip coins into my mother's pies. "Dollar pie  
tonight, Zinna. . . . It's Silver Dollar Pie Night. . .  
. We eat dollar pie, we'll be the rich getting richer."  
(4, 10)

But then the reality and the hurt press in. When Mary asks for money to buy an angora sweater because "everybody has one," he father has to tell her no. He gives her all he has in his sagging pants pocket--a single silver dollar. The daughter realizes his plight more by vision than by reason.

He is changing to a transparent man. I can see inside his skin where his delicate bones join together at the hips, the ribs, and collar bone.

". . . Daddy, come back. Please." I am watching a

skeleton fold into a double twist and collapse itself.

"Papa," I plead. "I'm sorry I asked. I'll never ask again. Honest. I promise." (11)

Here is guilt and helplessness and inarticulate grief. Here are all fathers who fail daughters yet who remain their heroes, their first and last loves.

Similarly, in "The Glider" the gentle father figure in his dead perfection will ever prevent spinster Martha from settling for an ordinary man. "Her papa. The only real gentleman she'd ever known." Crude and insensitive Harold Lund in the shadow of such an idealized father image can never enter Martha's virgin world, nor, probably, could any real man. Her only alternative in the face of remembered father perfection is to conjure an ideal man--the glider pilot even in his shattered imagined state remains for her a "beautiful man. . . . He was dressed neatly and well shaved. Refined, a good man, a look of determination." Martha drags, or imagines she drags, her macabre lover from his crashed plane to her own room, and the reader must walk the slippery line between fantasy and reality. Harold is real enough though, pounding at the door and shouting obscenities, but Martha can still contemplate and even touch her cracked vision. "His face was split into a thousand pieces. . . . His face split like her crazy quilt puzzle, yet no piece was missing." She wills this vision each springtime--her way of keeping her promise to her father to find love. "When she willed it to come back it always did, as if she had extrasensory connections with the white beauty that sailed into her life with springtime" (29).

Even this flawed apparition, a symbol, perhaps, of the imperfection of vision after all, is better for her than Harold Lund, real and awful enough. No vision would call her "Old Cow Bones" or proclaim in front of everybody, "Old Cow Bones's got tits on her." No private visionary man would tell her that she was "horny," or say to her, "'I'm the only man big enough to take you on.' He cupped both hands over her breasts. . . . 'You'd like me to take you right now. Throw you down on that pasture grass and rip off your overalls. You know you want it. You know'" (32). Even a cracked vision would be better than that. And her gentle father would approve.

In my original review, I did touch on the almost-taboo daughter/father love in "Tangles." With more space and less fashioning though, I would have gone to the lines for proof. I would have talked more about its archetypal resonances, citing a passage in Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle* that is very close to Barber's vision of the man with yolky eyes--a man sinister yet appealing:

He was standing at the side of the bridge, a little off the path, holding a bunch of daffodils in front of him. He was a nice-looking man, neither old nor young, wearing a good tweed coat, not at all shabby or disreputable. He didn't have a hat on, his taffy-colored hair was receding

and the sunlight gleamed on his high forehead. I was walking ahead, as ordered (they liked to keep an eye on me from behind), and the others were deep in their plans, so I saw him first. He smiled at me, I smiled back, and he lifted his daffodils up to reveal his open fly and the strange, ordinary piece of flesh that was nudging flaccidly out of it.

"Look," I said to the others, as if I had just discovered something of interest. They did look, and immediately began to scream and run up the hill. I was so startled--by them, not by him--that I didn't move. The man looked slightly dismayed. His pleasant smile faded and he turned away, pulling his coat together, and began to walk in the other direction, across the bridge. Then he turned back, made a little bow to me, and handed me the daffodils.

The others were waiting above, clustered a safe way along the street. "What did he say? What did he do?" they asked. "Don't you know that was a bad man? You sure had the nerve," Elizabeth said grudgingly. For once I had impressed them, though I wasn't sure why; there hadn't been anything frightening about the man, he had smiled. I liked the daffodils too, though I threw them into a ditch before I reached our house. I was astute enough to know that I wouldn't be able to explain where I'd got them in a way my mother would approve of. (57-58)

Though Atwood's encounter is real for the child, while in the Barber story the child confronts the man in dreamscape, the archetypal male threat to the child is the same.

Outside of *The School of Love*, I have found additional reason to believe I've not imagined or imposed this father/daughter motif in the major stories. In her essay, "The Mormon Woman as Writer," Barber recalls her own father,

who always told me to be kind. He wouldn't allow me to say anything bad about anyone in authority or anyone else for that matter unless I could say three nice things. He told me, "Love one another" [These are the same words the man with the yolky eyes speaks to the child in "Tangles."], and he cried when babies were blessed and children confirmed. He was a bishop. But I also remember my father's hair-trigger temper, remember him slapping me in the face and saying, "Don't you dare cross me, you smart ass." I don't remember what I said. I may have plied the knife and salted the wound, but maybe I didn't. Maybe I was caught in the invisible web of his frustration about earning a living, feeding four children, and being a saint. Nevertheless somewhere I learned that saying what I thought was a dangerous occupation. (114)

Here is the Silver Dollar Las Vegas daddy trying to support a



family. Here is the basically kind father of "The Glider." Here, too, are elements of the unpredictable and half-threatening father of "Tangles."

Margaret Atwood in the front matter of *Cat's Eye* (New York: Doubleday, 1988) disavowed anything autobiographical in the work to follow, yet known things and people and places in her life are unmistakably there. Methinks she protesteth too much. The first words of that book, "Nothing ever goes away," testify that writers can scarcely edit out the autobiographical, however much they may distort or refine or reinterpret.

Phyllis Barber was generous enough to share several chapters of her memoir in progress, *How I Got Cultured*, and there it is again--the love/hate feelings of daughters toward their fathers. And here there appears to be no escape hatch of fantasy. In one revelatory moment, the daughter sees her bishop father with feet of clay. She turns his injunctions to her about the sin of pride back to him as he stands there foolishly in his Hawaiian hula-girl ward talent show garb. "'And don't start preaching pride to me,'" she tells him, "'You liked how everyone told you how great you were tonight. I watched you. You like being a star for yourself, not just for God. You can't fool me'" (53).

So this is how an unformed review would meander through the work at hand, only there would be lots more. There would be much praise for Barber's use of the language, for her sleight-of-hand ability to slip from the ethereal to bitter reality, from nightmare to exactitude of daily living. Perhaps I'd find myself not so Procrustean after all.

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I am concerned that if we do not, others will begin doing it for us, as the recent, highly publicized successes of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* or John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation* show.

Let me make this point another way. I read two books dealing with the Mark Hofmann case, both written by non-Mormons.<sup>1</sup> While the implications of the Hofmann affair are disturbing enough, I was particularly troubled by the opening chapters of these books, in which the authors thought it necessary to describe Mormon society and practice to their readers. Both of these accounts portrayed us as the ultimate defenders of the protestant work ethic, as the materialist embodiments of the American Dream, as white-collar Republicans convinced that personal righteousness results inevitably in personal financial reward. I do not question the sincerity of these authors, nor, alas, the accuracy of their observations. But this picture strikes me as utterly at odds with Mormon's peculiarly cyclical account of Nephite history, with the addresses of King Benjamin, or Christ on the Mount, with, in fact, the entire message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I am convinced that it is not only the portrayal of Mormons by the world at large that needs alteration, it is the culture they are portraying itself. To attack the culture, while affirming the faith, that must be the battle-cry of the Mormon artist.

Some of my colleagues with whom I have discussed this question have argued that the dream of such a drama is a chimera, that great art is based on equivocation, not vocation, and that the very fervor of our religious commitment hinders genuine artistic expressions or accomplishments. I regard such an argument as specious and respond by pointing to such Jewish novelists as Chaim Potok and Isaac Bashevis Singer, who are able quite unapologetically to represent their faith and culture without lapsing into sentimentality or dogmatism, or to the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, as proof that the imagery of belief can be as muscular and evocative as the language of unbelief.

In fiction and in poetry, we can point to works of genuine accomplishment. But drama has remained another matter entirely. Yet I remain convinced that the eventual creation of an equivalent Mormon drama is quite possible. And so we must ask: Why have none of the writers who have shown promise in this area ever emerged from the threshold of greatness? Why have none ever progressed beyond mere potential?

I am convinced that the fault lies neither in a lack of talent nor in an excess of religiosity. Rather, our best writers in this field have, in my view, suffered from the lack of a sustaining theatrical environment in which they could flourish. It is my intention in this paper to define what such an environment might be and to suggest some ways in which we might create it.

Playwrights, unlike composers, or romantic poets, tend to

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Lindsey, *A Gathering of Saints* (New York: Dell, 1988), and Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *The Mormon Murders* (New York: New American Library, 1988).

develop in their mid- to late-thirties; aside from the occasional Georg Buchner, there are few if any examples of theatrical Mozarts. Playwrights seem to require a greater knowledge of the world and of their own societies, of how human beings are likely to behave and what they are likely to say in response to the universal travails of the human experience, than artists in other fields. Ibsen was thirty-seven when he wrote his first masterpiece, *Brand*, and thirty-eight when he wrote *Peer Gynt*. The great prose dramas, beginning with *Doll's House*, were the products of a man in his fifties. Chekhov wrote *The Seagull* at thirty-six, while Shaw did not write his first play, *Widower's Houses*, until he was also thirty-six. While Strindberg wrote *Master Olof* in his twenties, his breakthrough plays, *The Father* and *Miss Julie*, came when he was thirty-eight and thirty-nine. Arthur Miller was thirty-two when he wrote *All My Sons* and thirty-four when he wrote *Death of a Salesman*, and Tennessee Williams did not produce his first stage triumph, *The Glass Menagerie*, until he was thirty-four. While Eugene O'Neill began in his mid-twenties, his first major success, *Beyond the Horizon*, came when he was thirty-two. Molière was forty when *The School for Wives* became his first masterpiece, and Shakespeare's greatest works date from the early years of the Globe, 1599-1608, his thirty-fifth through forty-fourth years. Even the Greeks followed this pattern. Aeschylus did not win the Festival Dionysia until he was forty or forty-one, and all of the extant plays of Sophocles came after his fiftieth year, while Euripedes was at least forty-three when he first won the competition.

What this suggests in practical terms is that the crucial years in the development of a playwright are the early years, the years from eighteen to thirty-five. In the playwriting program in BYU's department of Theater and Film, we see a constant stream of young writers who show tremendous promise in their early twenties. I assume that the same is true of other universities. But when we look at their careers subsequently, we find that they turn to writing novels, or movie scripts if they're lucky, while most become life insurance salesmen, bankers, or full-time homemakers. Whatever environment we have tried to create at BYU has no corollary outside our program. While we can provide playwrights with a fairly rigorous theatrical education, we cannot provide career opportunities for them following graduation, nor are there outlets with professional actors and directors capable of or interested in communicating the mature vision of a major Mormon playwright while remunerating such an artist sufficiently for him or her to survive.

My point is that great drama has always historically emerged from theater, and not vice-versa; the great eras of the world's dramatic literature have tended to come after the establishment of theaters and theater companies sufficiently robust to support them. Further, those theaters have always been subsidized--financially underwritten--and the reality is that the need for such subsidies is greater now than ever. In short, we will never develop a satisfying Mormon drama, until we have established and supported a

theater from which such drama might emerge, for the one will only arise from the other. The Mormon Shakespeare needs a Mormon Globe. To hope otherwise would be to ask for an impossibility--that God bring to pass his prophecies without human help, that the world be created *ex nihilo*.

This point seems to me to be a fairly obvious one and one with ample support from theater history. I have mentioned Shakespeare; but similarly, can we imagine Marlowe without the Rose? Can we even think of Shaw without Archer, Grein, and the Independent Theatre, or Hauptmann without the Freie Buhne? Would Molière have been possible without the Hotel de Bourgogne? Would it have been possible for Eugene O'Neill to have emerged apart from the Provincetown Players? Can we think of John Millington Synge and Sean O'Casey without the Abbey Theatre? Chekhov without the Moscow Art Theatre? Henrik Ibsen without Ludvig Josephson and Den Lindbergske Selskap?

Can any of these theaters be said to offer a blueprint for our own efforts? Three great eras in theater history seem to me to be particularly instructive: (1) Den Norske Scene, Ibsen's theater in Bergen, Norway, (2) the Abbey, the Irish theater of the early part of this century, and (3) the Moscow Art Theatre. All of these theater movements came from societies which seem strikingly similar to Mormon society of today. Each of these explosions of dramatic significance was the product of what had been regarded as a cultural backwater; each came from an area and culture from which a renaissance must have seemed most unlikely. In each of these periods of dramatic achievement, the major artists quite specifically and intentionally sought to explore and represent their own cultural heritage, just as our Mormon self-consciousness must certainly find expression in our drama. Such writers as Ibsen, Anton Chekhov, and Synge wrote plays of universal appeal and truthfulness; that is why we continue to study them today. Yet each did so within the confines of very specific cultural matrices. And in each of these eras, the playwrights of consequence were the products of theaters specifically created with the intention of encouraging them.

To a very large degree, the establishment of those theaters represented something of a leap of faith. When Frank Fay, William Butler Yeats, and Augusta Gregory established the Abbey, they did so in the hope that such playwrights as Synge and O'Casey would emerge, as in fact happened. By the same token, Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko and Konstantin Stanislavsky hoped their Art Theatre would attract talented young playwrights such as eventually emerged in the persons of Chekhov and Maxim Gorky, although they knew of none at the time. And when, in 1896, Chekhov's *The Seagull* failed in a production by the mainstream Alexandrinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, Chekhov decided to give up playwriting altogether, only to see his career revive with his storied partnership with the Moscow Art Theatre. And both the MAT and the Abbey were equally fortunate financially. The Abbey, of course, succeeded only due to the largess of the wealthy eccentric Miss A. E. Horniman. By the same token, the Moscow Art Theatre was saved by the generosity of

several wealthy patrons.

Ibsen strikes me as the exception which proves the rule. Although he did not write for any specific theater during his mature period, he was sponsored and supported as a young writer. Ibsen would almost certainly have been condemned to the life of an obscure country doctor or university pedant had it not been for the fortuitous intervention, in 1851, of an eccentric, self-taught violin virtuoso, Ole Bull, Norway's first major musical celebrity, who became obsessed with the idea of establishing a Norwegian national theater, free from the pervasive influence of Danish culture and language, and who decided, on the scantiest of evidence, that the young Ibsen was just the man to serve as artistic director. Bull founded his theater, and, as it happens, shortly thereafter lost interest in it, moved to the United States, and attempted to found a quasi-religious communal society, with himself as prophet and mayor. Nonetheless, Bull's money and other private donations kept the theater solvent, and Ibsen spent the next six years learning his craft as a writer and director. Both of the main Ibsen biographers, Halfdan Koht and Michael Meyer, agree that it is nearly impossible to imagine Ibsen's success as a playwright in later years without the experiences he gained as a young man in Bull's theater. During the crucial years of his development as a writer, he was employed as a playwright and director. He was able to make ends meet while perfecting his craft.

Of course the idea that Mormonism might produce playwrights of the quality of Ibsen, Synge, or Chekhov seems preposterous today. But could the impartial theatrical observer of 1870 have possibly predicted the course of the subsequent half-century of dramatic achievement? Could it have seemed likely that the exhausted and impoverished Ireland of Synge's youth would ever have mustered the resources for any real theatrical achievement? Given the brutal czarist censorship of the previous half century, how likely did it seem that Russia have been the home of the touring company that would transform the world's theatrical practice? In 1850, when Ibsen wrote *Catiline* and submitted it to the Christiania Theatre, it was the first new play which that theater had received from a Norwegian in eight years. Could anyone have foreseen that *Catiline's* author would today be lauded as the father of modern drama? To the theatrical observer of 1870, the thought that Norway, Ireland, and Russia would become the cynosure of theatrical interest within his lifetime must have seemed an impossible dream.

Granted, theatrical practice has changed a great deal in the past hundred years. But the change is towards, not against homogeneity, towards theaters of cultural self-definition, with an explosion of Hispanic theater companies, African American troupes, theaters serving the gay, or feminist, or evangelical Christian communities. Thus, both history and contemporary practice argue for this proposal.

For all these reasons and more, I urge this society to consider the need for a Mormon theater. Specifically, I believe that we need a professional repertory theater company, fully subsidized, charged with the task of discovering and nurturing new

playwrights, capable of supporting the best and most creative of our theater artists, and dedicated above all else to the furthering of a mature Mormon drama. But let me be blunt. I do not believe that Mormon drama--or any drama of cultural self-definition--can ever arise from the present commercial theatrical establishment, either in Utah or elsewhere. I do not believe that drama of this quality can ever come from even the most dedicated amateur theatrical ventures. I believe that such a drama will only come from a theater dedicated to discovering it. I am arguing for a new theatrical paradigm, built on the lessons of history, fired by the spirit of prophecy, innocent of doctrinally subversive intentions, but unafraid of the darker shadings of the human portrait.

Cannot such a theater arise from the universities, from professors or students at BYU or the University of Utah? I think it unlikely. I do not mean to imply that there is nothing a university can do to foster such a drama; on the contrary I believe that there is a great deal that we can and ought to do. But I do not believe that our great writer, when he or she emerges, will be either a student or faculty member. My experience has been that teaching is a full-time job; and my experience has been that even in the best of times, it is difficult for me to spend more than two or three hours a day for playwriting, usually stolen from my family and church responsibilities in the evenings, at a time when I am hardly at the peak of my artistic powers. Playwriting is far too demanding a profession to prosper under such circumstances.

I am quite aware that the creation of such a theater involves a certain leap of faith. But I am not really invoking the image of *Field of Dreams*, saying, "If you build it, they will come." Instead, I insist that my reading of history convinces me that if we do not build it, they will not come. I am aware that I am arguing for a theater building its seasons around plays that have yet to be written. But we need those plays; and until we build the theater, we will not have them.

I fully anticipate that starting such a theater will involve a great deal of difficulty, require enormous dedication, and entail considerable sacrifice. In particular, building a theater and maintaining it will require the investment of a great deal of money in a venture that not only cannot guarantee a return, but that almost certainly will never show a profit. Granted, we have in the state of Utah at least a few wealthy people who might be persuaded to be our Ole Bull or Anne Horniman. And I certainly do not mean to suggest that those of us interested in the establishment of a Mormon theater have been wasting our time writing plays and delivering lectures, when we ought instead to have been amassing vast personal fortunes. But I do acknowledge that the financial support for the establishment of a theater is and must remain a formidable obstacle. The research of such scholars as William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen in *The Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1967), Harold Vogel's more recent studies of *Entertainment Industry Economics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) and particularly Wallace Dace's *Proposal for a National Theatre* (New York: Rosen, 1976) suggest that even the most

prosperous and successful repertory theaters require an annual subsidy of 50 to 75 percent of their annual budgets, beyond the initial cost of construction. As Baumol and Bowen concluded in their ground-breaking study twenty-five years ago, "The economic pressures which beset the arts are not temporary--they are chronic. If things are left to themselves, deficits are likely to grow. Any group which undertakes to support the arts can expect no respite. The demands upon its resources will increase, now, and for the foreseeable future" (10). And time has confirmed their conclusions.

Might such financial support for a Mormon theater come from the Mormon Church, or more likely, as a tax shelter for Church-owned businesses? The question is not as absurd as it may seem. Certainly there is historical precedent for the establishment of a Mormon theater. A few years ago, the Church seemed quite willing to subsidize the production of a musical and even sponsored a contest encouraging members to write one. Nothing came of it, of course, but I do regard it as an encouraging sign. Hardly a general conference goes by with some expression of how concerned the General Authorities of the Church are about the deleterious effects of the images and ideas of pop culture. I share their concerns, as do we all, I think. The concerns of the General Authorities and the concerns of the Mormon artistic community are not as far apart as they might, on the surface, seem.

But the mature Mormon drama of which I have spoken must inevitably challenge the social constructs of Mormon society, must inevitably collide with long-cherished social assumptions. And a theater is more than just a building and an acting troupe. A theater is an audience.

I think that we would all agree that at present, in Utah Mormondom, there exists a theater audience hungry for modestly priced family entertainment. The question is whether an audience exists for a drama that would inevitably treat controversial and difficult subjects or take an unsentimentalized view of Mormon society. It is quite true that the controversialist of today tends to become the revered icon of tomorrow and that Mormon artists may hope to see the same dynamic work in their favor. Nonetheless, at present, I question whether the Mormon theatrical audience is ready to be so challenged. I feel that we must make building an audience that will tolerate, even applaud such challenges, the focus of our efforts.

How can we accomplish this? I would like briefly to make three suggestions. First of all, I am astonished at how little effort has been made to establish a theoretical basis for such a theater, particularly stated in terms accessible to the Mormon reading public. When I visit LDS bookstores, I see numerous books providing a gospel perspective on managing one's personal finances or food storage. I see very little if any writing attempting to find a basis in scripture for a Mormon aesthetic. Even so basic a topic as "protecting one's family from the bad effects of bad television" (let alone the more positive approaches to the creation of a Mormon aesthetic) has seen little if any discussion in what may be regarded as a fairly important forum for the building of an

audience.

Second, of course, we have an obligation to continue writing plays which attempt, to the limited degree we are able to do so, to stretch the boundaries of audience acceptability. Such playwriting will not result in the Mormon *Hamlet*; it may, however, result in a Mormon *Cambyzes*, *Gorbaduc*, or *Spanish Tragedy*. Those of whose who would write Mormon drama today must, in the absence of a theater, satisfy ourselves with the role of dramatic Eliases, preparing the path--or many paths.

At the same time, we have a tightrope to walk in this regard. As we build our audience, we must challenge, but we also need, as much as possible, to combat the impression that Mormon artists are by nature rebellious, at odds with the Church. I am reminded of Flaubert's famous dictum: "Be bourgeois and respectable in your dress and manner, that you may be radical in your art." I believe that our example in this regard should be Hugh Nibley, whose persistent, pointed criticisms of Mormon culture are known to have been based on a life of blameless devotion.

In this regard, I suggest that the plays we write and produce ought to avoid two major pitfalls. First of all, it is clear to me that our audience has a remarkable language taboo and that even relatively mild profanity is disproportionately disturbing to the Mormon public. While I have enormous admiration for such forthright contemporary playwrights as David Mamet and Sam Shepherd and while occasional profanity certainly has a legitimate artistic purpose, an acknowledgement in our drama of this particular audience concern will not greatly hamper the maturation of that drama. When we, in our drama, use language solely to shock, I believe that we set back the cause of Mormon drama as a whole.

Second, I believe we need to look closely at the subject matter of our drama. I am aware that I am treading on dangerous ground here, and I do not mean to point the direction future genius will take. But I believe that plays directly attacking or questioning public stances of the General Authorities of the Church are enormously damaging to the prospects of the establishment of a Mormon theater. Certainly we can and ought to deal with tough issues, even controversial issues. For example, the issue of battered Mormon women, the odd propensity Mormons seem to have for being taken in by con artists, the impossible dilemma of a Mormon homosexual, and the high suicide rate of Utah teens all strike me as remarkably rich topics for dramatization. But even these topics need to be dealt with with sensitivity to audience concerns and with always with a gospel perspective.

The dream of a Mormon drama must be realized step by step, line upon line. It will not do to simply write plays, sponsor contests, and deliver papers. Our efforts must first be concentrated on the immediate task at hand, the building of an audience and the building of a theater. And I foresee a time, years from now, when a Mormon drama will arise, a drama that not only defines, but also transforms Mormon culture, a drama of prophetic power and courage. May those of us who share this dream rededicate ourselves to its accomplishment.



## **POLLY AND KATY:**

### **MORMON FEMINISTS TAKE THE STAGE?**

*Nola D. Smith\**

The 1992 Women's Conference, co-sponsored by Brigham Young University and the Relief Society, took as its theme a verse of scripture: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). The conference included the debuts of two theatrical productions which appear in subtle ways to challenge the concept of the "life" of the Mormon woman as it is commonly defined, and simultaneously reaffirm the "place" of women in the LDS church. In view of this odd duality, are the challenges raised in these plays sufficient that we can label them as "feminist"? After all, neither BYU nor the Relief Society have reputations as bastions of feminist activity. Yet, on examining the evidence, my conclusion is that the plays are feminist. These plays not only expand the boundaries of the Mormon theatrical tradition by redefining the scope of the female protagonist; they also demonstrate that the term "Mormon" and the term "feminist" are not incompatible.

The two plays, *Polly* and *A Dream for Katy: A Celebration of Early Mormon Women*, though independently written, are remarkably similar. Both free-flowing plays employ a minimal theatrical realism for their production style. They use a few portable pieces of furniture, a collection of period hand props, and myriad unobtrusive lighting changes to suggest changes in time and place. Both highlight the lives of historic LDS women, affirming that these women, whether prominent or obscure, are worthy of emulation. Both self-reflexively tell their stories in the first person, through memories, casting their audiences respectively in the role

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of young visitors and imaginary friends.

The title characters, Polly and Katy, are unusual in a Mormon theatrical history that tends to focus on almost deified Church male leadership and scriptural characters or on idealized Church members. BYU professor Eric Samuelsen, commenting about the recent surge in plays about Mormon women, observed that it is the very lack of past deification of individual female historical figures that makes them accessible in current attempts to honestly reexamine ourselves as Mormons—feminist or not; playwrights don't have to fight against distorting hagiography.

As Polly and Katy review and comment on their own experiences, they cautiously raise a number of questions concerning the parameters of the life that each has led—questions that reflect the experiences of the playwrights, performers, and women and men both in and out of the Church. These two characters are of a quality not often achieved in typical Mormon theater, in that they were created as individuals rather than icons or "Everywoman." Authors Perry and Howe avoided what one critic identified as "an old and unfortunate literary habit of Mormon writers to leave out everything in life that is not [directly] church related" (Sharp 41). Because Polly and Katy are recognizable as genuine human beings rather than Mormon stereotypes or moralizing puppets, audience members are free to evaluate the merits of the characters' concerns rather than accepting or rejecting the characters themselves on the basis of how stringently they fit into a traditional mold. The plays are successful in introducing what is to many members a sensitive subject, that of a Mormon woman's "place," because the questions and conclusions are valid in the viewpoint of these unique characters. Neither playwright preaches.

The play *Polly* certainly makes no pretense of preaching. The script contains very little that could be construed as a message, with the possible exceptions of Polly's final realization that, in her own humble way, she has led a remarkable life, and a metaphor about bricks and trials. The playwright/composer/lyricist, Steven Kapp Perry, endowed the character with details from the life of his own great-great-great-grandmother Polly Matilda Merrill Colton, who lived from 1816 to 1891. The one-woman musical retells Polly's story from girlhood in Michigan to old age in Utah. In it she reenacts her history and the lessons she learned from her experiences, beginning with school and first crush and an exasperating cow, through her marriage to Philander Colton, conversion to Mormonism, and exodus to the west with the pioneers. Although many landmark Mormon events are mentioned, the emphasis is on Polly's feelings as she loses a child and later a home in Nauvoo, laughs over the little habits of her husband, and reflects on her progress from daughter to mother to grandmother, from a life of action to a more contemplative life reading about the adventures of her offspring in letters.

*Polly's* continued success—it played to standing-room-only crowds during the women's conference and has been staged regionally ever since—can be in part credited to its familiar format. This show combines the popular and low production cost mode of stake-

center-circulating plays about Emma Hale Smith or J. Golden Kimball, with the slick, bright musicality of *Saturday's Warrior* or *It's a Miracle*. Fortunately, this production avoids some of the pitfalls of either style. Though Polly experiences both heartache and turmoil, she relates her story laconically, with wit and an upbeat humor that is an antidote to the overly sentimental or pedantic renditions of too many LDS-oriented productions. Another part of its success must be credited to the performance of Johanne Frechette Perry, an award-winning graduate of BYU's Musical-Dance-Theatre Program and veteran of the Young Ambassadors company. Ably assisted by Off-Broadway director/choreographer Mark Huffman, Perry plays the demanding role with an endearing charm and handles the transformation from adolescence to maturity with admirable skill. All things considered, *Polly* may become a lasting hit with the main-stream Mormon, or even non-Mormon, audience.

But where, in this admittedly complimentary evaluation can one find any assertion of feminism? Johanne Perry, in a telephone interview, said that they have taken pains to avoid having the play labeled as feminist. Certainly the playwright makes no call for a reassessment of "woman's place" and reveals no unfair treatment on the part of men. Although the character Polly regrets her failure to become a "mover and shaker" and even, with some discouragement, repeats the theme that "a woman's work is never done," she never challenges the traditional role which designates her sphere of action.

*Polly* can be viewed as a feminist play in that it redeems rather than rejects the contribution of the mother. While for some time it has been the radical feminist habit to view housework as demeaning, *Polly* uses more of a Mormon cultural feminist viewpoint that reclaims the ephemeral work of homemakers as, in the long run, vital as any of the more conventional male work. Polly laments that she will only be remembered for cooking and sewing and candles long burnt while her husband's brick houses will stand for generations; yet she finds hope in the belief that her story will bind hearts and minds together for generations throughout eternity. The play itself centers on Polly's life, not on her husband's, unlike many of the plays nominally about Emma Smith which tend to focus on Joseph. In it Polly makes her own choices and discovers her own strengths in embracing a traditional role by her own will. Based on her own contemplations, the play is, as the saying goes, her story as much as it is history.

For those who find it too much to consider "eternal woman's work" feminist by any stretch of the imagination, *Polly* may yet be considered a feminist play due to the nature of its origin. By his own admittance Steven Perry only reluctantly accepted his bride's sacrifice of her own Broadway aspirations. Rather than ignore his troubled conscience, Perry used the talents he inherited from his mother, successful composer Janice Kapp Perry, in creating a professional "showcase" for his wife's abilities. The play, two years in creation, is a deliberate compromise between family and career, designed, as he describes it, to "make it possible for her to perform as our family continued to grow" ("New Musical").

Whether he labels himself so or not, Perry is a male Mormon feminist, not only unafraid of his wife's strengths, but taking seriously the Church's admonition to support his wife in her continued growth.

Although Steve Perry is credited as the author of *Polly*, he is not the only contributor to the script. Along with the continuing editorial input of Johanne, Perry benefitted from periodic encouragement and criticism from a reading group of Mormon theatrical notables such as James and Lisa Arrington, Marvin Payne, and Joy Saunders Lundberg. Another play credited to a single author that was in part shaped by a group voice is *A Dream for Katy: A Celebration of Early Mormon Women*, written by Susan Howe and directed by Claudia W. Harris, which underwent the cooperative ordeal of BYU's Playwright/Director/Actor workshop during the play's formation in early 1992. Howe retained creative control throughout the workshop, but she was attentive to suggestions; and in the end, the words, especially of some of her contemporary characters, were shaped by the workshop participants to accurately mirror the outlooks of a gathering of Mormon young to middle-aged adults. One outcome of this process was that Howe was confident that she was accepted by and supported by the very audience whom she hoped to reach. The workshop validated her vision.

Howe's play, like Perry's, "celebrates" the strength of Mormon sisters of the past. Her focus is somewhat different in that the story focuses on a fictional fifteen-year-old, an intellectually precocious girl nicknamed Katy. This difficult role was admirably acted by Carolyn Varga, who, like Johanne Perry, never left the stage during what the cast dubbed "a one-woman marathon with chorus." More of a pageant than a play, this theatrical benefit was co-sponsored by BYU's Theatre and Film Department and the Women's Research Institute, and drew on the donated expertise of historians such as Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Jill Mulvay Derr, professional acting and music coaches, and the support of a long list of theatre technicians. It boasted full period costuming and a number of authentic props, and utilized nearly every lighting instrument the De Jong Concert Hall system could accommodate. The cast of thirty actors who played the balance of the forty-three roles was drawn from the ranks of Howe's and Harris's friends, students, and colleagues (a few of whom played the roles of their own kindred dead), and included a number of BYU professors such as Gail Houston and Tom Rogers. Most of this large group of talented volunteers felt personally committed to the production and its message; the presentation was not actually a "professional" production in the strictest sense of the word, but it certainly wasn't the average roadshow.

The focal character of Katy, who wants to know "how to be a Mormon woman of the twenty-first century," asks the questions Howe and many others have asked in the face of cultural and sexual prejudice too often confused with gospel principles. Though the play is not autobiographical, Katy, like Howe, confirms her own sense of self-worth and the right to her own ambitious dreams through the rediscovery of her spiritual predecessors and sisters,

the women of the early Relief Society. These sisters, including Sarah Kimball, Eliza R. Snow, Emma and Lucy Mack Smith, Emmeline B. Wells (who founded and directed the Relief Society's vast efforts to collect wheat for charitable purposes), Ellis R. Shipp (an influential and pioneering Utah physician), and many lesser-known figures, become Katy's mentors as she slips back and forth between various times in Church history and her own past and present. The play is modernistic in its flexible use of time—Katy does not merely review the past; she interacts with it as she receives advice from her role models of the nineteenth century and applies it to her own life.

For a play that was, it is surmised, a little bit too outspoken for use as the sesquicentennial play for the Relief Society as a whole, the script seems curiously innocent, even submissive. Katy's age was lowered from adult nineteen to girlish fifteen to prevent any threatening edge of anger from entering into the characterization. The advice Katy receives from the past does not urge her to revolt against what she sees as injustice but helps her tame her temper. For instance, she is told to state her opinion calmly and clearly rather than to rage or use insults. She is told to have patience with priesthood members who may insensitively usurp her accomplishments, to ask for an apology but always be forgiving, and to wait for the presiding priesthood to set things straight. Katy as a small girl may protest being denied a Boy Scout merit badge after fulfilling all the requirements to earn one, but eventually she becomes resigned. Forbidden by an overprotective father and brother to go on a school-sponsored service trip to a Mexican orphanage, she finds other outlets. She is instructed to hold on to her dreams, but to wait until she is older. The play leans over backward to avoid taking any overtly controversial stands, and contains very little that might possibly be construed as "male bashing." As is only fair, Katy also has to learn to deal with discouragement from biased females, as embodied by a group of her "in-crowd" friends. Katy, who claims to be a "normal" teenager, knows how to blend in with the crowd. She copes by hiding her serious aspirations from her clothes- and boy-conscious friends who believe it is unfeminine social suicide to run for class president, a view which is fortunately far less common than it used to be. The play even surprised its author by revealing some condescension towards women who prefer nonacademic professional pursuits such as cosmetology. (This aspect was toned down in the workshop.)

Whereas Katy's contemporary dialogue is constructed to avoid spooking sensitive audience members, the full-grown historical sisters are allowed to speak out, as they did in the past. Katy's main function in the play is to be a bridge to the remarkable but somewhat overlooked women of our Mormon heritage. Howe spent untold time researching the diaries, records, and historic documents of the early Church. As a result, the characters of the play often use the exact words from original texts, rather than the selectively excerpted or revised versions; without fanfare, for example, in the script Joseph Smith "ordains" sisters as the presidency of the newly created Relief Society, as the original wording was written.

Emmeline Wells gratefully recalls a blessing given to her by Eliza R. Snow. Several women are called by Brigham Young to head Church-wide economic enterprises. While these occurrences would be considered shocking today, they are accepted as proper in their historical time frame. The scenes representing sisters leading large political rallies in support of women's suffrage and the efforts to ratify Utah's bid for statehood, of young mothers attending medical college, and of women writing seriously for and editing their own newspapers, of women organizing against the United States Congress, are all authentic. One noteworthy scene features three women quoting directly from a "memorial," or petition, addressed to the delegates preparing the Utah State constitution. The memorial, published in the *Woman's Exponent* and delivered to the congressional delegates, was written in behalf of the Utah Suffrage Association, the National Relief Society, and the Young Ladies' National Mutual Improvement Association, and bore 25,000 signatures. The memorial concludes:

We therefore ask you to provide in the constitution that the rights of citizens of the State of Utah to vote and hold office shall not be denied or abridged on account of sex, and that male and female citizens of the State shall equally enjoy all civil, political, and religious rights and privileges. (Howe 68)

The words of this quotation are very close to those of a basic dictionary definition of feminism: the belief that women should have the same legal, economic, political, and social rights as men, or the movement to achieve these rights for women. Stripped of all its negative connotations, the term *feminism* simply means according the same dignity to all people regardless of gender. Susan Howe has achieved a singular feat in guilelessly reminding us that the LDS Church has always been a feminist Church in the purest sense of the word. Like Perry, she has looked to the past for prototypes of strong LDS women. She appeals to our pride in our revered pioneer heritage and reminds us of the time when women not only had independent power but used it for the benefit, not the detriment, of the Church and their families. She has made a start in refilling the gap left in our history when the influx of Victorian values gradually nudged LDS women out of the centers of activity and exclusively into the home. On a personal note, it is this play that made me realize that while I could name my Mormon fathers by memory back for six generations, I could name only one of their wives.

A *Dream for Katy* is not an outstanding play according to artistic standards. Its pacing is awkward, and at times the sheer amount of information presented makes some scenes static. Yet the play is exceptional in capturing the widespread movement among Mormon women to reclaim the sisterhood that was theirs in the past, in order to be able, as the final scene demonstrates with simple but stunning theatrical power, to stand in the circle with all their mothers—not that everyone seeks such sisterhood. Two weeks

ago our Relief Society teacher warned us that even thinking about feminist issues meant we were being led by the devil. The question this play makes conspicuous by its absence is: If sisters were encouraged to use all their inherent strengths then, why are they so often discouraged from doing so now?

Mormon theatre has always tended to record the way Mormons are or believe they are, rather than reveal what they will be. Audience reaction to *A Dream for Katy*, written and directed by Mormon feminists who are careful to put their Mormonism ahead of their feminism, seems to indicate that feminist questions are no longer part of the fringe but rather are part of the mainstream of Mormon thought. Mormon sisters are beginning to see that there was a time when it could be claimed, as the women's conference theme suggests, that in some ways they had life more abundantly then than they do now. It may actually be that, as far as the sisters are concerned (and therefore likewise for the brothers), all is not yet well in Zion. Happily, as is evidenced by the creation of Polly and Katy, progress is being made.

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## HEART OF MY FATHER:

### C. THOMAS ASPLUND, A RETROSPECTIVE

*Marni Asplund-Campbell\**

I would like to begin with an apology, for what I have to offer today contains much less of academics than of religion--religion with all of its accompanying fear, mystery, and emotion. As I have prepared for this presentation, trying to impose a structure on the writings my family and I have collected and edited over the past two years since my father's death in 1991, I have felt frustrated by my apparent lack of progress. In my profession I have learned to take pride and feel accomplishment in the well-wrought conclusion. Even if that conclusion is a deconstructionist's chaos, it is still presented with sophisticated rhythms of logic and language. But my work defies sophistication, for I am actually performing a messy family ritual of resurrection and redemption. The resurrection will occur as I provide for you a "retrospective," literally a vision of my father. Many of you never knew Tom Asplund. Some of you knew him well. No one knew him as I did, as an adoring daughter, and so I am creating for you with words which are the substance of immortality, an image of a poet and a man.

The redemption is, I must admit, the selfish portion of this project, my attempt to carefully, gently objectify that part of the man who was my father so that it may, if only for a moment, come into alignment with my father who was a man, an artistic, insecure, faithful, cynical man, who once wrote the wry couplet, "Sometimes my soul is shrunk to such a pitied size / That I must stand on tiptoe to see out through my eyes." Hence my frustration, my failure to find any closure in this retrospective. So much of what I think of myself is contained in the verses he wrote. Now I must turn that image back onto myself, as I function as critic and create the "over-written" text, the palimpsest. Rachel Blau DuPlessis describes this over-writing in a way which gives me hope

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in my pseudo-academic task: the palimpsest, she writes,

indicates the desire to manifest, by some verbal or textual gesture, the sense of presence, simultaneity, multiple pressures of one moment, yet at the same time the disjunct, the absolutely parallel and different, the obverse sensations of consciousness in reality. (111)

I am compelled to read responsibly, if sloppily, caught as I am in a web of relationship which is my very self. My father writes in his journal of the quest for literary immortality:

I used to think about what I might leave, but it doesn't bear on my mind so much. Mostly it's the kids. And that's another presumption I've surrendered too. I used to be concerned about parents who presumed their children to be superior, gifted, special. Now I know mine are and I'm going to enjoy the fact.

I am his text, described in this same journal entry as someone whose "efficient goodness is like a gently massaging swirl of warm water." Returning to the image of the palimpsest, the over-written text, I find I must eschew the literary scholar's impulse to have the last word, for my words are his words. My father's poems become my father; and my father represents, in my mind, my relationship to him, which represents my relationship to myself. He expressed this complex of relationship much more eloquently than I can in the opening lines of his long poem, "The Heart of My Father":

Who knows what an electronic microscope might do to the great  
gulf fixed between faith and knowledge? I suppose that

one day some  
chemical mechanic under the flickering death of florescent tubes  
will find deep within the coiling chemistry of my island  
body a germ  
of that narrow dirt road  
which ran through summer's miasma of sweet  
clover between a beaten windbreak of dusty  
cottonwoods and an irrigation ditch

my father ran down tripping ruts of clay where once

Later in the poem he describes how his father's presence shaped his sense of religious duty and of God. The climactic moment of the narrative poem comes as Asplund relates an experience he had accompanying his father on a pastoral visit to a dying member of the community. There is at the death bed the pastor of another community, who is anxious to claim the dying woman. As Asplund's father quietly "yields to his adversary," Asplund experiences a visionary ecstasy, his father appearing as the literal deity:

I waited for the lightning of my father's reply  
for the majesty of His Priesthood  
for the great white tumbling stone of his faith  
for the star of the morning  
the crumbling drums and trumpets  
the voice of angels  
we believe all people are the Children of God, said my Father  
and he yielded to his adversary  
The funeral was held in the Church of the Minister.  
My father attended  
as a faceless mourner.  
And my heart turned to my father and I sensed  
in the blood that poured through my turning heart  
the pain of hunger  
the pain of time  
the pain of faith  
the chemistry of faith  
And I prayed for my naked and bloodless soul in the  
coming of that  
great and dreadful day.

He wrote in his journal of his sense of intellectual and spiritual obligation to his father:

I have always thought that our fathers go a long way towards defining our view of God. It's not that I equate God with my father--but I am able to conceive a being who is protective, caring, good humored . . . because I could see those in my father.

Understanding that my work of compiling and presenting to you writings which carry the language of my father and of my father's fathers (and I do note with sorrow but not surprise the conspicuous absence of mothers in this literary genealogy), I will proceed carefully.

As a writer, Tom Asplund was not prolific. But the little poetry he wrote has passionate intensity and an honest connection to his deepest emotions and philosophical convictions. He could not affect a literary voice, so his writing was limited to moments of genuine spiritual insight. Like Coleridge, he labored painfully over a few works, mourning, without the assistance of opium, his lack of poetic fruitfulness. His fundamental dilemma was markedly different from the nineteenth-century poet's, however, for as a twentieth-century North American white male Mormon poet, bishop, and father, he was obligated to carry on a career which nearly always drew him from his writing. His writing reflects this frustration, his sense of being caught between tasks, performing none to his satisfaction. Writing poetry, which he described to me alternately as "sitting for a long time looking out the window," and "taking down your pants in public," was by economic necessity a low priority. I can see the frustration of this uncertain identity in the final section of his poem "Seasonings":

In the thin part of the afternoon  
When light, like a loved child,  
Is gone too soon and Earth shrinks small  
And cold like the breast of an aging mother,  
I discover myself on the other  
Side--the thin black back  
Of a mercury mirror, too cold  
For quick, too black  
For silver,  
Where once I stood  
Behind a parent's brooding oaken dresser  
Hiding from an afternoon of childhood.  
Hiding from both  
The fact and the reflection.

In many ways his work reflects the emotions and themes of the twentieth-century expatriate writers who were fashionable in his intellectually formative years, a sense of disillusionment and isolation. He was literally isolated from his western homeland, and from his Mormon colleagues, living and working far from the center of Mormon scholarship which this conference represents, and yearning often for contact with others who shared fundamental intellectual and spiritual concerns. Of Mormon literature he wrote:

Yes we do need art and literature that manifest our culture. It is a distinct culture. . . . Like ancient Israel looking back to Baal when his vision was dazzling and agreeable and tempting--our cultures can turn back if we have not an artistically convincing expression of that culture.

He wrote and submitted for publication in a Mormon journal a humorous piece, a pseudo-academic study of the works of a fictitious writer Eliza Cole, which manifests his sense, fifteen years ago, of our reluctance as intellectuals to acknowledge a very real Mormon culture which does exist, although it may violate the conventions of great art. Eliza Cole writes "Relief Society poetry" and in a letter to her daughter says:

This professor or something in *Dialogue* says that to talk about a tradition in Mormon literature is a joke and that no one takes literature seriously. Well, I never! I've been working as hard as I can for years, and I know you have too. It may be that he doesn't read the magazine and leaves it to his wife. But that just means that if he was a Russian and didn't go to church, he'd wipe out 90 per cent of the Russian Art tradition because he'd never seen it.

Gene England calls this "anti-provincial provincialism." The piece was criticized by the editors who rejected it for making Relief Society poets "our niggers," but it reflects if anything a genuine

love and admiration for a form of literature which was uniquely Mormon, and an ability to imitate the forms of academic writing and Relief Society poetry which is uncannily entertaining:

Cole identified the essence of the form, and in later years wrote the lines that could, though unintended, provide the manifesto, as the introduction of *Lyrical Ballads* did for Romantic poetry. The piece not published, was found in her journal and appears to have been written about five years before her death. It is entitled "Buns and Art":

Fresh butter buns are in my thoughts  
As I walk through the art gallery.  
I left them on the kitchen cupboard.  
The children and Frank will come home before I do  
They'll eat a few,  
And smile  
Everyone smiles when they eat my butter buns.  
The whole house sings when I put them in the oven.  
They are sweet and savorous  
A paragon of taste  
The nonpareil of size and cast.  
Butter buns are, to me, art  
No less than easter eggs by Fabergé  
Or lamp shades by Tiffany  
Or these big bronze women with backs that sway.  
Just because they are sweet and easy to swallow  
Doesn't make them foolish or sentimental or  
shallow.  
There's as much art in the scullery  
As there is in the gallery.

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They turned it down.  
They called it purple poetry.  
I cried  
And folded up the letter quietly.  
Through tear  
And tree I watched the sleepy evening sun  
Touch western clouds  
And light them one by one:  
Mauve, magenta,  
Violet, puce, lilac, plum!  
God's art is purple, too.  
Now I don't look so dumb.

He was isolated professionally--a believing, practicing Christian in the midst of avowedly humanistic legal theorists; and he was well aware, near the end of his career, that he was becoming professionally extinct. This unfinished poem, one of the last he wrote, expresses his fear of becoming frivolous, an appendage to

society, performing tasks that were redundant in a younger, faster, more cynical world:

South along Baishiqiao Lu,  
Just outside the wall which separates China from  
The Friendship Hotel  
Is a small park  
Heavy with a dust that is China--  
No more than 20 trees--plain poplars and shaggy-leaved  
locusts  
And paving stones  
Instead of grass.  
Where old men bring their birds.  
Every morning they peel off from a grey river of bicycles  
On Baishiqiao Lu  
And glide into that park with a flourish of bicycle bells  
And in a language of fragrant tones  
Far beyond me they  
Speak and smile what I know to be  
The happiest of songs--  
That sung by friends glad to see each other.  
Two, sometimes three, cages are strapped to each bike,  
Covered in neat quilted denim.  
The cages are unstrapped and hung from low branches  
Like strange fruit,  
Carefully spaced and the covers peeled back (spaced like  
diners in an all-night coffee shop)  
To blind them from one another.  
The old men say  
If one bird sees another sing, it will imitate and  
Lose a distinctive song.  
Each sings his own song.  
Pulling his head down into a fat  
Throat like an Italian tenor  
The voice may burst like a cannon shot of an early moon--  
Or insinuate like a curving smile.  
Trills and arpeggios and echos  
Unaccompanied suites of such unrivalled goldenness  
That Mozart himself--gift of God--would weep  
These plain fat wrens, with neither color  
Nor cause to confirm them,  
Flightless birds, preen vain voices  
In prayer or praise or sheer joy.  
Long days to listen to birds and buses along the Baishiqiao  
Lu,  
And sometimes the old men take the cages  
Whose bamboo bars are bent in form and function  
That is the strength of a civilization that has  
Weathered wind and hunger and blood and long pointless days  
along  
The Bashiaquiao Lu to the  
Farthest echoes of time

. . . so sometimes the old men take these cages  
And swing them in slow arcs above their heads  
And back again.  
The birds flap and grasp their perches  
To hold them selves from death and destruction as their  
world  
Tumbles and turns in  
Senseless spasms and revolutions.  
It is to exercise the birds, make them try  
Their wings, else they become fat and lazy  
And die.

And he was isolated as a man who wanted neither manhood nor  
patriarchy as they had been defined for him. Many of his poems are  
remarkable to me for their awareness of that which was feminine  
within him:

#### Emma Smith Speaks Her Piece

I asked you not to go  
But someone got there first  
With other words  
As they so often do;  
So now I speak my piece.

Please, forgive  
A wife's proclivity for last words  
And fond distrust of those  
Who dream  
Without sleeping.

Please know  
Of all my pains  
None is more exquisite than  
That inflicted by  
This understanding: the only  
Reward God gives a true prophet  
Is the vision.

In the end nothing was yours,  
Not even the mantle.

And please know, too,  
That I was less jealous  
Of other handmaidens  
Than I was of  
Other voices.

\* \* \*

## Emily and Innocence

I watched you in the garden when you were not aware.  
Attending worlds and wonders I could never see,  
You spoke small and stormless questions I would never dare  
And answered from intimacies I could never free.  
I saw my history written in your bent and quiet muse--  
Part of me that had been innocent and worthy I perceived.  
It came like the meeting of an old love--  
Passion gone, a true respect received.

No longer do I look with your eyes into that twirled blossom  
Or flashing butterfly, as once flesh  
Of my flesh I saw with infant eyes the budding revelation  
    come.  
It is enlightenment now, not light I watch.  
Soon you'll turn and run to me when you are done,  
And I'll recall a day when man and child were one.

Finally, his poetry speaks of the isolation of Christianity. This theme he drew from other poets--Gerard Manley Hopkins, T. S. Eliot, John Donne--the daily commitment to oddness, to victimization; and in this sense of Christian isolation he found his true inspiration, producing simple poems filled with the pain and ecstasy of a life spent searching for grace in a graceless world:

### Upon This Rock

We laughed in the temple  
    and found favor where  
the Lord lashed with lightening and laughed too  
  
    when he saw the size of salvation.

Adam between the consecrated trees  
tied his hammock for secure slumber  
and fell not with the night  
and with the morning rose not  
but slept in the sun

As tangled fishermen slept too, in a garden  
tumbled in sleep  
secure in the infinite grass  
and dreamt of glory which flashed by them in the night  
then shattered like a crowd of guilty waifs found  
apple-stealing  
when Old Man Death raged.

Oh Jesus loves this careless freckled world  
that stretches aimlessly where  
lilies left and fig blooms blown

(eye hath not seen)  
blackbird whistle and bobwhite song  
(nor ear heard)  
and hours and days that no man knoweth  
flutter  
fall  
in the forest  
like  
wastrel leaves.

With all of that  
Jesus had to trust His Judas  
a calculated concern  
(dreamless with the pungent balm of love  
frugal with the poisoned sacrament of sop)  
to tie Him on a tree.

\* \* \*

#### A Comforter

Still you come to me in the night  
Walking with bare feet whispering



And still you force me to come round corners  
that could wait,  
To face a minor premise I am avoiding.

Still you draw me from the logic of time,  
Reasoning with knots and pieces  
Now that I have turned round corners that should wait,  
To leave a minor premise I am enjoying.

Still you push me down a busy street,  
Whispering of dead men talking,  
Until we come to corners that should meet  
Upon a minor premise I am trusting.

Still I come to you in the night  
Wakened to a silken apron's rustling,  
And still I end in corners that must wait  
To trap a minor premise I am hiding.

\* \* \*

### Convert Baptism

As Christ stood stand we now  
No muddy Jordan but smooth tile  
And white cotton where once a hairy goathide hung  
And no dove comes down the slant of brown chapel light  
But for a moment witnesses with bend head and fallen  
hands  
Without the world without a word  
The congregation stands  
Posed on the infinite question

Master, is it I?

As Christ stood stand we now  
From this grace to grace forward  
Pure within this moment  
Beyond the water or the word  
For as in Adam all men die  
Even so in Eve are all men quickened by a common cord

And down we fall in the deaf rush of water  
Down in the hole from here to Kolob  
Hostages to the running tide of belief  
We tumble from Eden and the ecstasy of anticipation  
To Gethsemane and the ecstasy of faith

\* \* \*

This next and final poem was set to music by my brother, Christian Asplund, for my father's funeral.

### Hymnsong

I have sung these hymns so often  
Fragile wisps now frail and broken.  
Prayers by word and music we try to soften  
Let them hang where gentle hours surround them.

These hymns are traced so lightly I often  
Slight them as I worship with my congregation  
Confused that to beg eternity such a feeble thing is ~~done~~  
Not scratched in stone as man to man has spoken.

Temples have been piled from generation, stone by stone,  
To generation, standing when the sounds and hymns are gone.  
Broken walls we pile again to find the wisdom of Solomon  
But gone, gone from here is David's harp, and David's song.

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## LIFE TRANSITIONS IN THE POETRY

OF CLINTON F. LARSON

*Ellen Bonelli Pace\**

### To a Dying Girl

How quickly must she go?  
She calls dark swans from mirrors everywhere:  
From halls and porticos, from pools of air.  
How quickly must she know?  
They wander through the fathoms of her eye,  
Waning southerly until their cry  
Is gone where she must go.  
How quickly does the cloudfire streak the sky  
Tremble on the peaks, then cool and die?  
She moves like evening into night,  
Forgetful as the swans forget their flight  
Or spring the fragile snow,  
So quickly she must go.

Surround yourself with Larson's poetry and begin to read. His facility with diction, rhyme, and rhythm, the richness and range of figurative language, the timeless, universal appeal of content, bring Shakespeare or scriptures to mind. There are many lines--and a good number of poems--of such exquisite beauty that they take one's breath away. In both lyric and narrative poems, his touch is as light and sure as breathing.

Certainly, Larson's poetry must be read aloud. His attention to exact rhyme, meter, refrain, and alliterative, harmonious sound leaves nothing to chance. The poems scan flawlessly; but even so, the visual imagery sometimes surpasses the sound. Larson sees everything in vibrant color. This prayerful hedonist revels in beauty. Read his poetry and it begins to seem that Dickinson used only pastels; certainly Eliot, and even Whitman, owned only charcoal. Larson paints in oils. If it is true--as Wordsworth,

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\*Ellen Bonelli Pace, an Ogden educator and playwright, is working on a biography of Clinton F. Larson. This paper was presented at the Association for Mormon letters annual meeting, January 22, 1994, Westminster College, Salt Lake City. Dr. Larson, who was in frail health at the time the paper was given, died in late summer 1994.

Sandberg, and Dickinson all have said--that giving pleasure is the purpose of poetry, then Larson's poetry fulfills its purpose.

The depth of metaphorical, symbolic imagery and the seriousness of theme, however, reveal that Larson sees a higher purpose. Elusive and complex as it may be, message transcends all. He writes with passion but almost always with the intellectual objectivity that protects from sentimentality. There is creative genius in the wealth of symbolic language he employs.

Surely "To a Dying Girl" will become a classic. It is one of a few of Larson's poems that accepts death with some degree of serenity. There is no horror here; the only violence is sunset as "cloudfire." While the voice of the poem expresses the sadness of parting, the poignancy and profound silence of the night when the girl is gone, there is the promise for her of an eternity where the lost beauty of this life is mercifully forgotten "as the swans forget their flight / Or spring the fragile snow." There is a peace that emanates from water; and the vision of mirrored, quiet water, of gliding swans, and of evening gentling into night lend a timeless peace that transcends all loneliness. "Pools of air" and "evening into night" are familiar images. Although his vocabulary seems limitless, Larson also has favorite words, and such words as *porticos*, *peaks*, *fathoms*, and *waning* are often associated so strongly with his private symbolic meaning that he can choose no other.

"To a Dying Girl" displays Larson's fine ability to orchestrate his verbal music. The first line cannot be hurried. The sounds are delineated: "How quickly must she go?" She is very much in the world, questioning, but in the second line ("calls dark swans" in adagio) flows into the andante "from mirrors everywhere" within the same line. The urgency of line four: "How quickly must she know?" is foreshadowed by the gathering forward that dominates line three. Then there is still time, now that there is no turning back, for memory. Majestically, the throes of death and its sure touch "streak the sky" in the "cloudfire" of divine command, but in line ten, with rising anticipation, "she moves," now choosing the poet's vision of eternal spring.

While there is beauty and tranquility in much of the imagery, there is no tranquil transition from life to death here, and the sorrow of the poem's voice is made very clear in the repetitive thread of the questioning refrain "must she go?" In this poem, refrain is exceedingly important musically and thematically. Larson links the words "so . . . go" in the internal rhyme of the last line, quickening even the divine command and ending the poem with a sense of inevitability and finality. The poet's question is answered: "So quickly must she know."

As is always the case in Larson's poems, while God is light, death is darkness, even when the promise of eternity and reunion with God is present and the vision of eternal spring is clear. The dark oblivion of death, the repeated emphasis of "forgetful" and "forget" in line eleven, is a familiar concept in Larson's poetry. The death of a loved one is compounded by a second loss as memory fades: "In that quiet room, where years elapse . . . . shattering

and intervening / Into dust, . . . .As memory dies in the  
silvering tomb of day" (from "Sepulcher"). As the less lyrical poem  
"Funeral" illustrates, Death is usually unexpected as well:

What is this sudden hiatus,  
Lapse, or interregnum  
In which you depart like a flown  
Swallow? I turned,  
And you were not there,  
And you kept going  
My memory of memory  
Going, vanishing, until you were past  
Like the fervor of years  
That turns the systems  
Of philosophic fright  
Into the deltas of God.

While philosophic complexity leads to complex transition in  
"Funeral," like virtually all of Larson's poems it contains subtle  
beauty, as in the lines: "my memory of memory," "like the fervor of  
years," and "into the deltas of God."

Larson's religious vision of death's forgetting is clearly  
expressed in this poem from his Civil War collection:

**My Peace I Give unto You:  
Epigraph of the Savior**

All those who remember  
The peregrinations of history,  
Forget forget forget.  
Only I may retain  
The glory, and the glory of pain.

The poetic voice of God provides solace in the promise of resurrec-  
tion and extends the additional comfort--the peace of forgetful-  
ness. The true agony of the crucifixion is Christ's assumption of  
sin, the harsh "glory of pain," tempered by the exaltation only he  
attains through his singular memory of humankind's journey to  
resurrection. There seems to be an ambiguity in Larson's vision, an  
uncertainty borne of his doctrinal "knowledge of humanity's since-  
forgotten preexistence, a presentment that forgetting carries both  
joy and pain even in the worlds to come.

It is rare for this poet to portray Death as a kindness:

**Marie**

Invalid, you hoist your words  
Like puppets, servile on a string,  
Creating happiness. You smile  
Wanly at us when you should fling

Your pain. Knowing you, we wait,  
Waking to a gritting glimpse  
To move your bones like sticks  
To fresher air. Our valor limps.

Tired, and so you let us go.  
And now we tuck you in, and wring  
From you, forever in a box,  
Your kindness in our suffering.

The stark, flat language and explosive consonance of "Marie" emphasize through understatement the narrator's anguish as courage fails at sight of wasted "bones like sticks" moving in restless search of ease. The narrator speaks ironically of "our suffering" as the martyred girl chooses the "kindness" of death. This poem seems plain compared to others more representative of Larson's lyric style, but the nuances of empathy and human understanding are typical of his insights. It calls to mind the beautiful, haunting image of " . . . willows . . . brittle and bare / Like arms I have seen, imploring."

#### General Robert E. Lee

Sunset is a lake, an evening silk  
That slips and darkens, issuing  
Away and calming. Dawn's talc  
Of morning is dusk, the memory.  
Fingers may touch a nearby fold  
As if to gather, gather softly  
And raise it into sun, cold  
Against the deeper shades, west  
And down: ah, sun's lake  
Is slowly flowing, as if volcanos break  
Horizons in a languor of the sun.  
Last lights burnish steel  
Of leaves as if a slowing  
River folding into an inlet  
Where willows stir the air  
Though they are brittle and bare  
Like arms I have seen, imploring.

The obvious is that the poem is a unified whole, a visual metaphor -- "sun's lake" flowing down, as multitudes in the defeats of battle, through the eyes of General Robert E. Lee.

Are there more unique descriptions of morning mist than "dawn's talc / Of morning is dusk, the memory"? "Dawn's talc" shouldn't work, but it does. Layer upon layer of images and meaning are compressed within the lines: metaphor of sunset, a lake, described in the terms of yet another metaphor--water of finest silk, slipping and darkening (and the image includes within its depths the implication of pools of blood cruelly spilt by war) with the image of darkening blood clotting into the molten, thickening

density of "volcanos" that "break / Horizons in a languor of the sun," at the sunset of a second day. Throughout, Lee's vision relies on shifting hues of dawn, bronze sun, the blackness of wet silk and blood and darkness. In the last rays of a languorous sun, leaves become the "burnished steel" of swords, no more a weapon against the enemy than the swords of dusk had been. And all the poem's intricately interwoven symbolism is ordered in spatial time that is circular time, with the eerie quality of waking, unwilling, endless dreams. The dusk, also memory, also history, also the essence of the soul of an heroic man, his army a "slowing river" sinking into the swamp, who join their weakened, reaching arms with the spindly branches of drowning willow.

In his Civil War poems (1988), Clinton Larson describes his own intense vision which he has created from the words and maps of history. He sees, hears, and smells the actual battles, and breathes the sweet sickness of decay that war brings. He has created in his mind's eye pictures of battles so detailed that he might describe the uniforms and horses if he wished. At one time, he could sketch every battle with each undulating advance and retreat, blue or gray.

Larson's own explication is needed, however. Considering the depth of symbolism and compression of the poet's meaning, all of this explanation is simplistic and superficial. As author-critic Levi Peterson once said of Larson's poetry: "Damn, it sounded fine! I didn't have a clue as to what it meant, but it was great poetry, and I knew it!"

In the metaphysics of Larson, all creatures abandon mortality with reluctance, albeit with courage:

#### To a Dead Sparrow

The gauze of snow around him stiff,  
His beak erect and jaunty, wry  
In death, the sparrow seems to sniff  
The air as if he thinks to pry

Into a cause he ought to overlook,  
As if the wind brings down a hint  
Of God. He bundles round to brook  
The cold, his patience by the dint

Of valor wrought on chiming air,  
Brought down at last, he rests above  
The earth in white, a trifle sere,  
But still, and proper as a dove.

Note the use of "wind" signifying the Holy Ghost, the personification extended to the last stanza as courage imbued by the Spirit: "Of valor wrought on chiming air."

Among Larson's later poems, there are few that express the longing for death contained in the lyrical lines of "Viewing at the Mortuary":

Implausibly fine, the locks of her hair  
Shimmer like grain in the summery fields,  
Like years that embrown the virgin land  
Fallow and even for days that are fair.

For sleep that is fair she quietly longs,  
Breathless to live in the realms of night,  
Skipping and poising for the longer play  
Beyond the day and the threshold of songs.

Her voice is low as the whispering wren's,  
As quiet as listening worlds of the sky,  
The shadowy fields, the fountains of light.  
Lashes closed, she leaves the paths and the  
years  
That brought her here for effusions of hymns  
That still the wind-tousled locks of her hair.

Even as the woman of the poem yearns for "sleep that is fair," the poem's voice describes this earth's beauty through simile. One wonders how "sleep . . . in the realms of night," and "effusions of hymns" can be more desirable than shimmering grain and whispering wren. In spite of his preoccupation with life's unavoidable, unexpected violence and cruelty, Larson's work throughout his career has reflected his stalwart assertion that this world is beautiful and desirable, and not to be lost without regret.

Only in a number of very early poems, including "Secret Rendezvous," published in *The University Pen* (1938), and in the short stories found in his master's thesis (University of Utah, 1947) "The Prisoners: Stories of Our Time," does Larson address death by suicide, those "Who live in the sorrow / Below which there is no other." He chose for one protagonist in the prisoner stories the predictably dramatic response of youth to "the brutality of regimentation," and the irreconcilably "hostile environment" of war that "drives him to his death." In a second story, the dénouement is also essentially tragic, but "the prospect of dying is mitigated by his exhilarating anticipation of release in death." In all three stories of "Prisoners," Larson explores response to environment: the social and industrial conditions in Wales, and one man's struggle to free himself from economic and political bondage; the psychological despair of a man "harassed only by the recriminations of his own mind" as a result of what he perceives to be a personal loss of honor; and the efforts of one man to adjust to the harshness of the world about him, realizing one cannot remain isolated from life. (Larson, "Explication," 1947)

It is interesting to read Larson's short stories, which contain great social consciousness but which, as literary products, are less effective than the poetry written at the same time. The complex linguistic structure, the layers of abstract concepts, the wealth of personification and metaphor, and the extensive, compressed narrative detail all lend themselves more easily to



poetry than to prose. In fact, the poet described his creative process (*Dialogue* 1969) with an example relating to the creation of "Homestead in Idaho," often considered to be his finest narrative poem. He had begun it as a short story, which he realized after six weeks "just didn't work," and he began to delete those sections which did not scan as poetry. The first section quickly came in this manner, and the second section was written in forty-five minutes.

Part of Larson's genius is the skill of his craft, perfected very early in his career. Reading the poetry of Brewster Ghiselin and the orations of Hugh B. Brown, two men Larson declared to be his primary mentors, one concludes that their example stirred Larson's creativity into recognizable awakening but that the heart of his genius rose intact from his own gifts. His interest in symbolic literature and his love of language were already evident in the quite masterful "Crucifixion in Judea" (1936) in which, as Larson says, he gave Golgotha, the cross, and the nails--inanimate objects--a responsive voice.

The intensity of Larson's involvement with literature is well documented in his preface to *Anthology of American Poetry* (1962). While rejecting rhetoric and expressing distrust of "schools," Larson says poets cherish style and each new poet feels that reality is his personal commodity. Poetry "becomes a kind of religion--his own religion of experience, the furor about tradition notwithstanding." He acknowledges that the American poet (himself) is "basically a romantic creature." Larson feels that "eternality inheres in the linguistic image" more so than in the real image because of the poet's relationship with language: "The modern American poet wants to write eternal poems because he feels that the shape of significant experiences is eternal" (*Anthology* 1962)

For Larson, the poet was the "Oracle of American Life, the Interpreter," and poetry's creative ordering relied on these truths: (1) there is a definite formal aspect to content, (2) there is a contextual aspect to form, and, finally, (3) both content and form are to be controlled "by the audacity and probity of the masculine" [sic]. The poet's credo is expressed in:

#### The Still Center

I have seen in the still center of every man  
The immutable mask of the central fire no one  
Sees. No farther in must thought run,  
No farther, for it to be. For wisdom scan  
Not in for fear:

The mask is worn  
Inward always in all, in the idiot's scorn  
Withholding him even always apart, his will  
Unreal, except for it; in him its genius,  
But, however near, he never reveals  
It fully, the tides of his articulation as if sere,  
Away. And what in the child is sternly sifted  
Down from the babble and play but it, the sign  
Of all in man that keeps the real in him a vine?

In other words, few but the visionary poet have the courage to see the human soul. Though scorned and held apart by society's fear of his articulation through literature, the reality and the genius of the poet are found within his vision. It is this gift in human nature that "keeps the real in him a vine," that is, rescues the integrity of soul and leads him back to God. On the subject of the world's reception of the poet's vision, Larson occasionally has expressed cynically realistic expectations:

### The Tower of Winds

I seek the stair that winds against the turret's stone;  
I seek oblivion, nor the least renown;  
In the great hall the obscene chatter thrives,  
Deliquescing in the general cheek.  
The impeccably and blackly draped strut in silks  
That orb the ocellate gold and green,  
The peacock's fan. They fix polarity,  
Scourge the aberrant, and praise a senile wart hog  
For his virile ways.

They seize him in the afterdays  
And turn him, squealing, on a spit, the barbecue of fame.  
From a window where a buttress flies  
To sea-borne rock I gaze, and  
Then withdraw to the secret clangor  
Of stairs, shaded from the strong silence  
Of the amber afternoon.  
Through their choice I draw away, they who  
Will not have themselves, they who know me  
In the rock of their living bone: oblivion.  
Unsummoned as the lyre of Sicily,  
I wait in the portals of the tower's rock and call  
Into the wild surf of brittle time  
That showers on the marrow's bone  
And endless carillon of shells.

So much for the wealthy and their adulation of the senile wart hog! This poet will hide out behind a buttress, draw away into oblivion, thank you, and waits unsummoned as the lyre of Sicily. The world has never been kind to poets.

Such petulance is the exception to Larson's rule, however. He has always had a clear vision of his purpose and position, clearly identifiable: poet, American, Western, Mormon . . . A review he wrote in 1982, "Concerning Western Poetry," expressed his near-missionary zeal in regard to the development of a distinctly Western literature, one that would "write seriously, maturely about the human spirit." He refers to Theodore Roethke's "Mystical Symbol," the western rose, and states that the charm and freshness of the phrase "comprises a contribution to mythic tradition." Larson prophesied that the West "is veering toward even more identifiable forms that will express the Western setting." Indeed, a serious contemplation of American history from the mid-1800s to

the present reveals the invasive influence of Mormonism on American religious and literary thought, especially in the West. During the past several decades, an elite, gifted few have contributed American literature worthy of enduring regard. During that period an even fewer number, almost exclusively of scholarly bent, have created fine Western/Mormon literature. Among those writers and critics, Clinton Larson earns the appellation "First Mormon Poet." The influence of his writing and of his organizational efforts in founding several poetry societies and literary journals has been profound, evidenced indirectly in the prose and poetry of his peers and in the writing of those who chose him as mentor.

During the late 1950s, Larson was teaching creative writing at Brigham Young University and writing poetic drama and poems with boundless enthusiasm. Larson has often said he has been deeply influenced by two men in his life. The first was Hugh B. Brown, who had been his mission president in England and whose sermons later as a General Authority were high-water marks in eloquence and rhetorical polish as well as inspiration. That mission relationship was very brief, beginning in April 1939 and ending in September of the same year when England's declaration of war against Germany (September 1, 1939) caused the missionaries to be sent home from England. During those brief months, Larson was also in Wales, traveled from Pontllanfraith to London to Southampton on August 30, and was arrested by Scotland Yard on September 3. Larson spent the remainder of his two-year mission in New England (Larson 1947).

Brewster Ghiselin, professor-poet at the University of Utah, was the second major literary influence in Larson's life. Ghiselin's scholarly, cosmopolitan, and "scientific" approach to the creative process in poetry made a strong impression on Larson. He became convinced that poetry is as essential in the spiritual life of those who are artistic by nature as theology is to more "practical" men. Beginning in his undergraduate years at the University of Utah and continuing to the present, Larson "is in a productive mode during all of his waking hours. He thinks poetically, he speaks poetically." (Clark 1988)

A precocious only child of near-idyllic Mormon upbringing, Clinton Larson had begun to contemplate his Mormon faith with deepening fervor sometime before his mission. He was seventeen when he wrote "Crucifixion in Judea" in 1936. The mission experience removed Larson from the familiar surroundings of his childhood for the first time, and the intensely sensitive, visually impressionable young man translated his natural homesickness into a lifelong affection for the unique beauty of Utah:

When I came home from my mission, in 1941, I saw an inspiring scene. I had done a little writing for church publications . . . but, really, my literary purpose with respect to the Church had not crystallized. But when I saw Salt Lake Valley from Parley's Canyon, I was deeply stirred. (*Dialogue* 1969, 75)

For him, as for many Mormons whose roots are in Zion, the place

became a symbol of the faith. In a poem published in the *South Dakota Review*, "A View of History" (1982), Larson says while he thinks of "Browning and villas Italianate," he finds no subjects for intrigue "among Venetian noblemen eager for coin and further favor."

But the green terrain of the West, so imperious  
In versions of eternal calm, involves the will.  
I am west of the seas of mariners who found America,  
West of Virginia of the Virgin Queen, of Williamsburg,  
West of St. Louis where arc or arch opens westerly,  
West of prairies to the ultimate peace, but east  
Of the great Pacific calms. The fragile filaments  
Of identity waver over the sills of fading green,  
The lakeland of Uintas, the Oquirrh isochores,  
The desert salt. Still, alone. A distant vagary  
Of motion. How can one remember Attica and Rome?  
The great sea that once was Bonneville has left  
A shore above the outland salt that seems a strand  
Of platinum, or a Lake. Forget, forget the lure  
Of memory. History is a place where time curves  
The distances of blue, where a gardenia is an aura  
Of the orange mesa above the marine of the Colorado,  
Where the seahawk floats, where an edge falls away  
Into leagues of watercarving in the rock, below,  
The prehistory of antiquity.

Larson's intense study of the lives of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young gave him a reverence for the traditions of history and the significance of the West in twentieth-century culture. Larson wrote his poetic drama, *The Mantle of the Prophet* (1966), to show the close connection between heaven and earth, as demonstrated by Joseph's inspiration that the Saints should move West. Larson is convinced that Brigham Young was inspired both by the attendance of the Holy Ghost and by actual "visits from Joseph Smith as he crossed the plains" (*Dialogue* 1969). In *The Mantle of the Prophet*, Brigham Young addresses the casket of Joseph in Nauvoo:

We are as straws together in a swirl of wind;  
We pass over the land until the wind puts us down.  
Joseph, the Twelve remain, and the ache  
Of your vision is with us and must be fulfilled . . . .

. . . I have looked into your eyes  
And have seen the far horizons of the West,  
The wagons and the prairies white and golden  
Under a summer day. I have seen the cleavage  
Of land from mountains. In the depths  
Of my heart I wander there, where the gulls  
Ride above a silver sea and the sky  
Like a veil hangs over a great valley.  
How can I know where this may be,

Except as I remember you in my stride  
That brings me west?

Brigham Young again addresses the dead Prophet: "I have come from the East / To find you, and I have found you only here."

Larson views the West, with its "inland sea," the Great Salt Lake, as holy ground:

Where the people may gather, where  
The mountains decline with the sun.  
I have seen the inland sea in the silence  
Of your eyes. (Larson 1966)

In a 1987 review by a student, Gary Burgess quotes Larson as asserting that Western geography contains in itself the Spirit of the Lord and that the Utah valley enlarges itself to be the state, and the West. "This is Zion you see. Utah should be the center of a great cultural wheel. The Mormons should Christianize the United States, just as the Celts Christianized Europe." But it becomes obvious in Larson's writing that he believes the conversion should be accomplished primarily through Mormonism's culture. He perceived the Nauvoo period to be a flowering of literature of the Spirit in the world, and Nauvoo to be a great cultural center where religion and culture were united. He bemoans the dearth of creative individuals willing to show the grandeur and beauty of the gospel and its Church.

Unlike many, Larson neither rejected his background nor renounced the world. He might show impatience with the didacticism and narrow vision of middle-class Mormonism, and he would certainly condemn the horrors of war and senseless cruelties of human beings and nature, but he would consistently and eloquently exhibit a humorous tolerance of human foibles and a saintly compassion for human pain. As Karl Keller noted in a review of Larson's work, Clinton's poetry is not art filling a religious purpose but "religion succeeding in an aesthetic way."

Eugene England, who co-edited *Harvest*, an anthology of poetry (1989), states: "Larson was the first Mormon to make poetry his religious vocation." England adds that Larson embraced this religious vocation "as a means to observe and understand better his own people, their history, faith, and divine potential."

Larson has a very specific focus: he feels that "the poet should leave most doctrinal matters to the latter-day oracles and . . . convey testimony and religion into the actualities of art and life" (*Dialogue* 1969). He has consistently identified poetry as the language of the spirit:

It seems to me that without question poetry is the principal language of the spirit. And I think this is generally agreed upon by the modern poets. There is plenty of precedent for this view: for example, the Apocalypse and Isaiah. In the Bible the tradition of poetry is a spiritual matter. (*Dialogue* 1969)

Larson has always felt that the Church is far too devoted to functional prose. He feels, in this regard, that the Western world should emulate the cultures of the Near East where the poetic spirit is still recognized as a means of spiritual communication. He feels Mormons become doctrinaire rather than affective in use of language. Larson's comprehensive study of biblical and Book of Mormon scripture, as well as the historical and literary documents of the 1800s, is highly influential in his close identification of poetry with visions and prophecy, and its impact is also evident in the biblical lyric quality of his work. His favorite choice of form is the baroque--a style he says "relates the realities of earth to the realities of heaven" (*Dialogue*, 1969).

Part of Larson's passionate regard for poetry arises from his firm conviction that "we must have different voices, and these must be individual voices. . . . For the artist, this individuality comprises the stewardship of his talent as it applies to the Law of Consecration" (*Dialogue*, 1969). Larson recognizes that truth may be expressed in a variety of ways. It is his belief that Christianity must protect the highly individualistic cultural values of literature and accommodate the temperamental, antithetical nature of the artist who responds to spirituality when it is artistically conveyed rather than to doctrinal discussions. For the poet, the artistic work is his gift and witness (*Dialogue*, 1978).

Larson exemplifies the core of "reasoning" (but not "pragmatic") spirituality that so uniquely marks the Mormon faith. Mormonism is not only invasive and persuasive in its effect on American culture, but eclectic in its own progression. Mormonism seems to be both a cause and a manifestation of Western American culture, particularly in its pioneering spirit. Indeed, American religious thought has experienced a singular evolution since the proselytizing efforts of the Latter-day Saints began in the 1830s. It is difficult to determine where the influence of one or the other begins or ends.

Explications of Larson's work have made reference to his mysticism, and some critics have noted pantheistic or even animistic connotations in his writing (Geary 1974). It seems that Larson's "mysticism" illustrates a significant aspect of the Mormonism of his time, which is obscure to most but self-evident to Larson. The personification of the earth and the symbolic designation of wind as Holy Ghost, God as light, and Death as darkness, for example, which are so easily found in the Bible as well as in the Book of Mormon, are also an integral part of Larson's literary technique. Larson has said he tries to emulate "the great prophet-poet Nephi" to "communicate spiritually through symbolic language" in his desire to interpret the gospel through poetry (*Dialogue* 1978).

Critics have also made continual note of the "violence" of Larson's poetry. There are among his finest poems several that deal with the horror of accidental violence in a striking way--usually using the contrast of lovely imagery, lyrical lines, with the insertion of sudden, foreshadowed but still unexpected violence. Among those is a personal favorite: "Stringing Wire" (1973):

The wire rests in a flat concentricity;  
 Its barbs sprinkle light in the laden air;  
 The posts, erect as virtue, suggest the tensile  
 Wire taut on them, or added soon;  
 Then the rustle as the clipped band darts open  
 From his shears.  
 Fed into the lever, the wire strings and tightens,  
 Singing and tuning to a universal *ing*  
 Rising in the register of purpose,  
 To straighten in the air and brandish barbs  
 Like threat in the eyes of frenzy.  
 Smooth a crimp and cinch with a lever,  
 Holding the wire in a reticent glove that must be firm.  
 But as you absently note the sun over twilight time  
 It loosens, the wire rustles and whips,  
 Twisting in its surgery, bits of glove and flesh  
 In a slight spray of terror and infirmity:  
 Coiled before, and tight as a cobra yielding.

However, Larson has no affinity for violence. On the contrary, he has a great aversion to violence of any kind, particularly the wanton slaughter and maiming of war. As historian and scholar, Larson has been deeply perplexed by the senselessness of war. He was a very young man when residing in England as that nation fell into the grip of World War II. He became a serviceman a few years later; and while he possessed a fervently patriotic nature, his writing shows that he was appalled by the regimentation and brutality of soldiering. Any infatuation with the glory of it all was shortlived. However, he did develop a strong interest in the strategies of warfare; and while he was studying for his Ph.D. at Denver, his interest focused on the Civil War.

Larson learns in a very visual, graphic way. He seems to have not only a photographic memory of the written page but also a technicolor vision of the event described. He studies from the global perspective of the gifted (and have no doubt: he is gifted), then he processes the affective through the perspective of individual experience. He must have drawn the intricate movement of troops and the progression of each battle out on paper in order to have such a panoramic and detailed knowledge. During the fifties, when many of his Civil War poems were written, he was in awe of the spectacle, nearly overwhelmed by the implications of the suffering that resulted, and he retains a vivid perception of the Civil War as the great tragic experience of American history.

In the eyes of his critics and explicators, his Civil War poems are not his best work. However, as a comprehensive poetic contemplation of the intense human suffering inflicted by war his Civil War poems have few equals. His work seems surely as fine in symbolic imagery as the poems of Carl Sandberg or Walt Whitman. The fluency with which he writes, his originality and elaboration, and his talent for conveying the emotions of bereavement, have always been exceptional.

From "Battlefield" come these lines:

. . . Lines of infantry  
Moved through the radiance of noon where puffing loam  
Was fertile year upon year, where farmer kept his sons  
As agents for a fantasy. Desire kept them low  
As laden boughs, but the fusillade arrived  
From hill and rock, slight at first, then singing,  
Quietly, quietly now.

And again in "The Field of Gettysburg" he describes the poignancy of the battlefield: "the halos of midnight" and "the quiet dark" after the battle:

. . . the very field  
of sleep is strewn with soldiery who yield  
Pungency of flame that rose from railing  
Cannon on line in a glade, somewhere hidden.  
Now hidden more, they are still, as if tired,  
As are they who writhe and yield, bidden  
To consider restraint of purpose now mired  
In loam that reddens darkly the dimming sky  
A chamber for those who pass, or are passing by.

Even in Larson's treatment of "A Memorial to Ulysses S. Grant," he exhibits compassion both for the fallen soldier in "the revenants proclaim the rue / Of substance, the green of war . . . " and "the odd soul" who ruthlessly decimated the South:

. . . The maneuvers that dreamed  
On maps soften into mist as if they were braid  
And epaulets. What is that funereal box  
They put him in? This odd soul, who locks  
The memory in, will brace at dawn again . . .  
. . . He must feel  
The sun of war across the line again in fen  
Or field against the restless charge when  
Daylight is the darkest dayspring sunning him.

In his epic "Near Appomattox," through the voice of Sheridan, Larson describes Lee's army:

. . . It writhes, hunching feebly,  
Paling even from grey, and where skirmishers  
Were, ghosts of the brigades of Chancellorsville  
Glint in the sunlight and faintly disappear.

Sheridan describes the Confederate army's movement as he watches from a glen until:

His guard slows, and then his center, amazed,  
Offers the white banner, waving the dead  
Will of valor before us--Richmond gone,  
St. Petersburg, the Wilderness, and Gettysburg  
Long ago . . . . (Larson 1988)



And in the beautiful lines of "The Rebel Cause," Larson describes "Those halt and lame who press their hand invisibly / Where shot entered look for the expedient hush / Of forgetfulness . . . ." He speaks ironically of "The lustre of conquest," as the dead speak: "And we are laid to rest in dreams / That possess the century as it wavers away."

Larson feels an urgency to condense the significant experience of history into literature. Also in his view, for the sake of society as well as for himself, the poet must inculcate the classics, the meaningful, formalized literature of the past, into the creativity of the present. Literature is the language that "requires the mind's complete engagement," and is society's principal means of "consecrating experience," as exemplified in Larson's very early poetic drama entitled "Deirdre":

Forever the cup of Christ and Excalibur,  
That shaped our prayer for Erin. Goodbye!  
Goodbye, Erin!

Sing of evening, the Lotus whispers,  
Sing of midnight; sing of the breeze  
That makes blossoms speak of their desire,  
Calming into silence, drifting into sleep,  
Away from the stem, but held and held in fire,  
Faith's fire that must weep as it falls  
Of water weep at evening, sunset's falls  
Of light across them burning in.  
The flame of sun makes the morning come!  
Oh, weep for morning, morning's ushering,  
And sing. . .

Larson's clear-eyed, unflinching view of life, yet his unfailingly innocent integrity, are aspects of his character that have kept his poetry fresh and new through the years; but his humor is most significant among those qualities which make his work such enjoyable reading. He has a reprehensible affinity for puns, as illustrated in such titles as "The Wizard of Awes," "Still Life" (on violent death), "Well-Laced Tea," "The Artful Dodgson, Storyteller for Children," and "Playing Possum," about the poet trying to sleep in: "My tail around a branch, my fur drying," who complains: " . . . if I found folks / As tucked as I and lacking yokes, / I would never jostle them or boss them." When asked if he is properly awake, he replies with eloquence: "Mmmf." And there is his view of the newscaster in "The Five O'Clock News Has Spoiled My Dinner," ("Where this buzzard hunches like an actuary"). Or have you read the one about Victor Borge and salsa? One day in March or April of 1990, Larson whipped off a short note to an old friend: it is called "Boyish Question":

Mr. Lawrence (D. H., not the English camel driver),  
"What is the ultimate reality?" The question inveighed

Against ultimate seriousness. What, in Said  
Of Egypt or in Geneva or in Lux or by a shriver  
For any persuasion to a humble, ingenuous deriver  
Of good, did it mean? Who knows? One lies abed,  
Wondering and recusing in lieu of insight, well read  
In the cryptics and dyptichs or not, as a striver  
For sense. Bounding therewithal like a retriever  
Of duck, he comes up with naught, though bred  
In ethical persuasion. Even Lawrence, a demurrer,  
Hard bitten enough in answering a disabuse,  
Said "What?" and noured his way through in a critical use  
If waffling to avoid a sharper response. What a furor  
He started! Lady Chatterly, an ambitious recluse  
Put off by a gardener, rejoined, surer  
About him than before, something in susurrus.

As the years have passed since his retirement from Brigham Young University in 1985, there are so many of Dr. Larson's poems that flow easily by, as if he had paused in the arduous work of poet for a restful, recreational stroll through memory. If the notetaking is accurate, this one was written March 1, 1990. It is called "Beloved Books," and a portion of it reads:

I met Sir Thomas in a shaded hall,  
Where legend hung like tapestry: silver gold  
Against a wall, and beyond, a silver lake  
Shimmering in a light of evening and brightening in a  
mist  
Of stars. The hush was like a confidence  
That rests unspoken in the hush of mind.  
"Arthur is there in glory," he said. Silence  
Attended him forever, like the legend  
Of the crests that shine against the glowing light.  
Blue frost wavered into memory. A lantern  
Gathered light from the drowsing sun and kept  
The hall in light that remained above, a clerestory  
Of the legend of colors: the wash of eglantine,  
The purple of Lancelot, deep chrome, vineyard  
Ivy, Roman gold, shipwake holly, and the sangria  
Of stories retold in havens of the yellow gold.  
Dim tones illumined them and swept into a panoply.

Another written as if in memory of his old and well-known friend,  
(King) "Arthur":

Look around. These remain, of us, upon a crest.  
They close around the candles. You wane  
In blue-white in the space below a flame.  
Holy, now, your due for the last bequest  
I offer you. Move into the moving rain  
And keep our memory that dims in the shame

Of the oldest sin, in which the test  
Is only intellection. Vesuvius, run with lava  
Until the city fills with flame. Blame  
Pompeii, its languor well remembered  
In the casual light of arches, or in the rain  
Of time, now so well encumbered in itself.  
Now rise alone, but keep the chivalry and crest  
Adroit as the very conscience in our lore.

In contrast to Larson's lighthearted, often satirical wit, there are his long, reflective, highly religious poetic dramas and epic poems. There are many, but among the best are "The Witness," and "Princes of God." Even in the beginning years, Clinton Larson wrote from the scriptures with this same fluid ease of familiarity. One realizes the scholarly bent of the man when considering that there are few subjects he has not pursued in the intervening years.

Larson will certainly be remembered for a number of outstanding narrative poems. Among those is one about a child left by its mother just for the afternoon, called "Nearly Forsaken," which contains many levels of symbolism and a poignancy that is heart-wrenching. There are so many narrative poems of enduring quality. There is "Jesse," the controlled, affective story of the death of a childhood friend. One of his earliest and finest is "Homestead in Idaho," with its final rebuking cry of "Solomon! Solomon!," and there is "Letter from Israel Whiton, 1851" with its timeless lines: "I am the measure of that journey, / Never to return," and the stricken, brief note of death, "Eliza is still as I write." No theme is more prevalent in Larson's work than the poignancy of loss when a loved one dies nor the measure of yearning as a loved one suffers.

Among the narrative poems written in recent years we find one about the Colemans, a couple Larson knew in his vacation hometown of Midway, Utah:

#### Guy Coleman, after Teresa's Passing

Teresa, saint, you free the clouds into salient blue.  
I guess your place where the avenues ascend  
Into a curve. North star near, you send  
A radiance for my reckoning. I drew  
You once from Arcturus where darkness does not ensue  
At night in the stellar brightness you lend.  
Lend me, now, composure. I cannot stay to find  
Dark shadows that move in rooms to strew  
My patchwork memories. We walked away  
So dreaming that we forgot the play of aging  
In pallor, in the luxuriance of what to say  
Next as smaller talk, having whispered, engaging  
Youth again, we thought, yet shaking  
With surprise that we could sense time breaking

Thin, and wisping. Teresa, I whistle morning  
 Into being as I did then. But now it loses  
 Lilt of song and settles in a mind that chooses  
 Silences and reminisces in starlight. A warning  
 Hushes me close into myself in my adorning  
 Sentiment. My loneliness is as strange, bruises  
 My emptiness where it fails, where it refuses  
 Solace. It reaches for you where a scorning  
 Jay wings down. The consort of these fields shirrs  
 His wings, abrades with chattering. Down by the river,  
 A path will dim away. I see you there. The giver  
 And redeemer whispers, almost here, and lures  
 Me to your side.

Larson's eclectic interests and his wide-ranging choice of subject matter have not diminished through the years of life's transitions. We are all familiar with the lovely, lyrical poem called "Lovers at Twilight":

A distinction may be made between the two.  
 She rests her head on his shoulder, shifting  
 Her lightness nearer to him, and he, lifting  
 Her hand from the bench, and wondering who  
 He might be to deserve her, considers anew  
 Her languor of ease, her comfort close by.  
 Almost nodding, nearly asleep, knowing why  
 She is so, that he has found her in lieu  
 Of anyone else, and she of course him, forever.  
 And such involvement, like orbiting suns  
 Of space gleaming or winking, in their shire  
 Of silences, strands of light no one can sever,  
 Extending forever! What is it in them that stuns  
 The will awake to attend what never will tire  
 In the chasm of night?

"Lovers at Twilight" is now one of several dozen beautiful love poems, some written in the past few years. This poem is so intensely personal, so close to the heart, yet the poet remains aloof. He has always been a private man, very circumspect in his revelation of self; but much of his poetry now speaks in the poet's voice, often vulnerable with open devotion to those he loves. "The Dance of Morning" ("You turned and came to me rising in light / Like silk before my gentlest breath") and "Our love is the sun over Eden" are representative of his more recent poetry, written largely following his heart surgery and retirement and often written specifically to his wife. Some are uneven, unfinished, but most contain more than a beautiful line or two as in "Holding You" which begins: "Time will disappear if you hold me." There is one called "The Fairest Notion," which contains the gentle lines: "Your hair auburn / And taken back from your cheek at the turn / Of my hand."

Any discussion of the poetry of Clinton F. Larson must pay tribute to his long years as a productive poet. His first poems

were published in the 1930s; his last book of collected poems, *Sunwind*, was published by Geneva Steel in 1990. Although he is now in fragile health, Dr. Larson continues to write.

We will end with one additional love poem, representative of the depth and restraint of this poetic man's always graceful life transitions:

### Hushed Refrain

What is this plaint of loneliness and loveliness  
That rests like mist against the listening ear?  
It surprised me when a window opened near,  
Across a meadow, near a lake. I confess  
I waited to hear it, to hear you as you bless  
The night you gaze upon and so appear  
Angelic near a parapet of sky and sheer  
As sapphire in dark Granada to press  
Impression into being. Come near as if it  
Were you, now arresting me. You are my brevet  
Love ensepulchred and coming into being,  
For it is now in me, though you come singing  
Lyrics of our confession before the touch  
Of love sequesters us together, never, never too much.

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## THE LYRIC BODY IN EMMA LOU THAYNE'S *THINGS HAPPEN*

Lisa Orme Bickmore\*

Mine is no callous shell,  
I have instant conductors all over me whether I pass or stop,  
They seize every object and lead it harmlessly through me.

I merely stir, press, feel with my fingers, and am happy,  
To touch my person to some one else's is about as much as I  
can stand.

—Whitman, "Song of Myself," 27

Beauty is momentary in the mind—  
The fitful tracing of a portal;  
But in the flesh it is immortal.

—Stevens, "Peter Quince at the Clavier"

The epigraph to Emma Lou Thayne's book *Things Happen* (1991) from Alice Walker, reads: "One wants to write poetry that is understood by one's people." In the same spirit, I want to say I am pleased and honored to be speaking to you, some of my people, today about a poet, one of our own, whose poems I believe to stand among the finest. Some of these poems I read when they were published ten or more years ago; one, "Love Song at the End of Summer," has stayed with me all those intervening years, shaping both my readerly and writerly consciousness with its heartbreaking grace. In order to address what I take to be a crucial ontological issue in lyric poetry, Emma Lou Thayne's in particular, I want to set up a rubric, and to do that I need to talk about my own studies of and concerns about the lyric.

I have been working for the last year on a study of a very long poem, *The Changing Light at Sandover*, by James Merrill, a contemporary American poet. The poem details the encounter of a late twentieth-century consciousness with a world other than this

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one. Merrill's sensibility as a poet is pronouncedly lyrical: most of his poems prior to this one, and since it, are lovely and highly wrought, and decidedly short, lyric poems which limn the characteristic subjects of the lyricist—"love and loss," in the words of one of the inhabitants of the long poem's other-world. Merrill's poem struggles not only with how to believe the unbelievable, the insistent intrusion of another world into this one, but also with how to express it—how to employ the lyric gift in the service of an unwieldy and mysterious narrative. In some ways, this struggle becomes a meta-discourse of how to fit the human into the domineering narrative of the divine; and what I find is that for a lyrical sensibility like Merrill's, one solution is to give the human its own insistence, to raise up again and again the figures of the human as a kind of caduceus, to ward off the blinding power of the divine. The otherworldly narrative that invades the lovely world, the this-world, of the lyricist, seems in this long poem to threaten to abolish it at every turn. Thus, one of the things that might be lost in Merrill's poem is the very world he loves, the world that those in the other-world also want, paradoxically, to save.

The world that Emma Lou Thayne's poems inhabit are not troubled or threatened by the encroachment of the divine, but they are troubled, as are all lyric poets, by the encroachments of time, decay, and death. The very things the singer celebrates are shadowed by their own ghosts: loveliness by bleakness, abundance by scarcity, flourishing by decay, the sentient body by its failure. The nearness of the ghostly to our loved presences is often so close to consciousness that we cannot bear it; so we make tropes to save this world. Commonly, we abandon this world, this beauty, for another that seems more durable—a spiritual world that trounces the angels of death hovering so near. One consequence of this trope is that the voice of the singer, then, can take us only so far, and then no farther: if the spiritual world becomes the ground of all lyrical metaphor, the voice of the singer may lose its earthly force. Think, for example, of the plaintive wishing of Yeats's singer in "Sailing to Byzantium," in hoping for an extra-natural state from which to sing:

Once out of nature I shall never take  
My bodily form from any natural thing,  
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make  
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling  
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake . . .

Inherent in this dream of a body no longer in nature is the loss of the human. And a singer that is not human has no song to speak to this world. What Yeats here subtly reminds us, and what many great lyric poets do as well, is that for poetry we have no other world than this one; and the song the poet sings is drawn from actual breath taken into an actual body.

The seduction of a spiritual world in which nothing dies, nor decays, nor falls apart, is powerful for us who love this world, this body, this flesh; we long to redeem what we love from the



forces of time and death, to ward off what will, finally, dismantle us. I have said this is an ontological issue in lyric poetry, because in many ways, the figural efforts of poetry are made in order to save the lyric world from extinction, from not-being; therefore, the types of tropes and our readings of them are most profoundly about lyric poetry's being. It is an epistemological effort as well: if the consciousness of the lyricist is purely consciousness, it more easily turns into spirit, a saving of the transient matter of this world by capturing its ideal, non-material, state. If we know in poetry by the mind alone, we turn more easily, of necessity, to an other-world. But the lyric poets always remind us of their one truth: that the body in poetry can only be redeemed by raising it, as itself, as a fleshly body, again and again as the figure and ground of our love and loss. This seems to me the profound truth in any theorizing of lyric poetry. It seems to me true as well of the poems in *Things Happen*, where the poems save the body, which saving simultaneously saves the body of the poem as well, its participation and being in this world. This is part of what moves me about them, what makes me want to return to them, what makes them great poems.

You can see what I'm talking about in the first poem in the volume, "Planting Wildflowers in September at the Cabin." I want to read this poem to you in its entirety, so that you can hear the way the poem enacts the perpetual lyric drama of redeeming the body into the body itself:

Easy, say directions on the can:  
Scatter, rake, or stomp in gently,  
spray/sprinkle till damp, not wet.

The moist seeds, webbed in the floss  
of each other's company, buried alive,  
come out with my fingers  
winged, Gypsy-ready for somewhere new.

Shaggy, hung with their own marsh  
and mountains, they cling to my fingers,  
scatter like kisses on the brown hillside.

I rake them in, say,  
Live here, tantalize spring.

In winter dreams  
I will return again and again,  
My palms wet with you,  
my nails sprouting your musky scent.

And flowers, surely flowers,  
wild as Gentian and Indian Paint Brush,  
will grow from my fingertips,  
silky bouquets to touch across my face.

And I will rise with them  
no matter where I am.

A reader of this poem will certainly hear, gently but insistently, the trope of the resurrection in the final lines: the speaker rising with the flowers, "wherever I am," in the many destinies of a human singer, the wheres that may, in truth, be the nowhere of death. One senses here, implicit in the tradition of such tropes, a turning away from this world, a rising above and beyond; rising into transcendence. But the world is ever the poet's lover: it lives in and through the upon her body, growing from her fingertips as if she were the earth itself. It is the weird engendering made possible by the bodily being of the poem: the speaker plants the seeds in a piece of beloved ground, then blesses them with her utterance: "Live here, tantalize spring." The poem itself tantalizes eternity, tempts it to come near, beckons it to turn our attention, in the dream-space allowed by lyric, to another world, where we may rise. But we do not rise: instead, we stay in the dream-space, where the body of the poet does not decay or waste. The poem raises up, in the traditional topos of transcendence, of resurrection, a body leafy and floral, a body magically, for the space of the lyric dream, both world and lover of the world. The body raised up in the poem is not a transcendent one, but a body rising with and through flowers.

I read this poem at length to give an example of the phenomenon I spoke of in my introduction: the body raised up as figure and ground of love. And there are plenty of poems in this book that enact the same gesture, patiently or not so patiently, turning our attention back to this world, to the bodily force of the lyric space we are in as we read. Take, for instance, the poem "Margaret at 94 Refuses a Retirement Center." Margaret speaks to us as a consciousness; but she does not allow her wasting flesh to fade from our attention nor let us forget that her voice speaks with breath drawn into lungs within ribs:

Vintage now, under the birthdays and loose clothing  
I am more than whispering out my time.  
I refuse to be lost in what I have been.

With my knees bone on bone, my legs parentheses,  
My back the curve of meeting itself,  
I would still be a body lighted by love.

If "Planting Wildflowers in September at the Cabin" veers dangerously near the transcendent turn, the figure of a woman at the verge of death begs for a release from the insistent reminders of the body's transience. Even here, though, the world is lover; the body is still beloved in its abjectness. She says: "God still sings in my shape though more of me / goes every day to join me later." The pathos of this body is redeemed by the figure of the divine; yet it is a specific sort of God that sings in the shape of the old woman: it is a god who takes his form from a natural thing, who

does not shun but rather embraces the specific bodily shape of this woman and the longings that spring from it. Even as she imagines death, it is not a death which leaves the body behind:

Then, when an old door shuts itself  
I will leave undemolished,  
me, a container of secrets, set for surprise.

Few enough times in our lives we get to wake up.  
I would wake swaying, I swear, like a sapling

enough to please the sky, my skin, and me

and him  
in a fitting place  
acquainted with the size  
of who I am.

Though God circulates in this poem—as singer of the shape of the body, as one who fits a place for "the size/ of who I am"—it is most strikingly here as lover he appears, even in the very refusal to name him as more than a pronoun. Though death demands an account here, the poem raises up the body; "swaying . . . like a sapling, enough to please the sky, my skin, and me / and him / in a fitting place / acquainted with the size / of who I am."

This poem raises the most potent questions. If the body may magically raise itself up in the face of absolute loss, insisting on its own force, then what of the body in pain, the body itself as the radical site of loss? This book is founded upon such an eventuality: its title reads *Things Happen: Poems of Survival*. One might add that things happen to the vulnerable body, yet the body survives. The poem of that same title refers to an accident that the speaker survives, though not without trauma:

Things happen. A crash like a shot, your hand full of blood  
From temple and eye, the split second. Speed ramming steel  
Into your newly spent lifetime the blanks of bewildered  
abruption.

Not in on what was before you, gone the luxury of seeing, of  
choice.

From the highway, through the windshield the splatters of  
morning.

Smashed to floating that side of your face, what it held.

Instant the clouds, the passages saying You hear me?  
Another place, a distant light, a flower in wind, you echoing  
Why?

Spilled questions wrenching your temple and eye to strenuous  
focus:

A dark navigable by caress and whisper. A stillness.

While one might expect, in a poem such as this, the abolition of

the old body, and in its place pure consciousness (as is the case in the poem immediately following this one in the volume, "When I Died"), what happens instead here is the phenomenon of the body's wound making the opening, the lyric space. In some sense, this poem issues from the wound, and its "new manual of how" helps us to interpret the body as locus of both pain and song. In "Margaret at 94 Refuses a Retirement Center," you remember, we are told "few enough times in our lives we get to wake up." The occasion of the wound is also the aperture through which new sight is possible. Sight is a trope for consciousness; the consciousness this poem provokes is located in the body. This is true also of the healed body figured in the poem, "You Heal," where after the "morning you woke / and everything works / and almost nothing hurts," what happens is that

. . . the heart of not  
figuring a way back  
just happens again  
in the still world  
like rain running the  
skies and green becoming  
the hand of the sun  
with God standing by.

The world and the body are redeemed. Again, God stands by, and what he does is approve, as of a new creation, of the reconstitution of the world, the body, by the process of the healing of flesh.

Such consciousness, new sight, located in and through the body, is not restricted to the moment of violence. Rather, what these poems point us to, over and over, is the fact that, in the space of the lyric, all sight, all consciousness, is located specifically in the body. If we look at the longer poem, "Nirvana," we can see this most profoundly. Subtitled "Last Morning after Time Away," the poem accounts for a state of mind that becomes talismanic for the speaker, who has been away from home and family. What this speaker enacts for us is the way that everything of the mind—memory, wish, conception, idea—has a specific bodily force. It is as if the body were the only real register of acts of consciousness:

You are ready for bed without knowing  
everything in for speculation. Formalities  
take shape: kneeling sitting lowering to a pillow  
nothing yet touching off edges and ends  
trying to let go of themselves:

Perhaps you will read them to rest.  
You will know when it is time:  
You will reach for the light  
barely sink from it to remember your scalp:  
how it likes to draw back on its goods  
free its face to feel: the pillow the cheek

the temple the jaw the ear flush with the down  
the case . . .

The speaker registers drifting off to sleep as a series of specific bodily renderings: thoughts erupt in the head; as she drifts off, she "remembers" her "scalp." But waking up is represented in the poem as slow and precise, a kind of ritual of bodily remembrance. It is as if the poem reconstitutes the body, piece by piece, sense by sense:

Then it is morning probably not late:  
No sound has found you only dreams  
not wanting to be lost. An eye might flicker  
toward the window for a time:  
No matter. The lid is unwilling  
to part for long with what is behind it:  
the generous granter of wisps waiting for form  
liberators, informants  
characters of a language never inconceivable.

You cohabit the space that is nowhere:  
Drafts and injections spill within you:  
You are empty and full by now weightless.  
Enjoy the luxury of levitation: Nothing  
is separate: No wrist or hip has ligament muscle.

Examine the comfort of everything  
come into place: tongue to mouth palate teeth  
surfaces having found each other:  
legs sheets bottom the outside of  
your ribs arms shoulder what they lie on.

What this poem gives us is the body as talisman; the flesh as magic protection against the undoings of the night.

I've saved the best of these splendid poems for last. "Love Song at the End of Summer" is a love song to the body. It enacts for us the famous mind/body split of western thought. Albert Grossman, in *Summa Lyrica*, says this of that split:

The poem is a solution to the mind-body problem in the same sense that a self is a solution to that problem. The unity of the poem, like the unity of self, being otherwise without a name, is disintegrated by discourse and restored by experience. (85)

Let me read you this poem, so that you can see its discourse allow for the disintegration of being, while the experience of hearing the poem restores us to the body:

It is clear now, body. Every day can be late August  
after the birth of babies, never quite cold.

But one must learn early what you are for forever.

Good old leather tiger, half domesticated  
by paws in pans and shoulders hung too often with beaded  
fur,  
you may think I forget. But you do not let me.  
By now I know better. I come back.

Still, you never take me not surprised, faithful one,  
by how to arrive, and the pleasure of sweat,  
and how to shiver away the bee.  
You move to the song behind the dance.  
Even after a standard, plain white, unstriped day,  
you ripple in our sleep and wait, mostly unperplexed.

And when, no matter how faint, the music breathes  
behind the catcalls of too much to do, you muster  
almost without my inclining, potent as needing to dance,  
to pace off the house, the garden of weeds, the clogged  
creek,  
and the midnight clutch of vagrancies. You pad from  
some spring, and wild, except for my importuning,  
go. To do it all.

When we lie down, it will be like the squirrel there,  
unflagging in the last swift moving in the leaves,  
August stashed in crisp piles above the dust.

I may find no way at all without your sleek taking.

Under the wrinkles that tell you no, I can hear you now  
saying, "I still love you," and to time, "Leave her  
alone."

The very form the poem takes is a dialogue of the self—the soul?—with the body. What the powerful discursive self is constantly in danger of is forgetfulness of the body—forgetting what we must learn early—"what you are for forever." The body surprises: its force is not to speak, but to be, to take the speaker where she needs to go, whether she knows it or not. The body here is its own argument: its presence, "old leather tiger," is its own reason for being, and its own way of knowing. The self is subjugated, domesticated; but the body is wild and potent, and releases, dances, moves, with the self, even as the self is in thrall to the "catcalls of too much to do." The body is the lover of the self, and does not flag, and never fails: "When we lie down, it will be like the squirrel there, / unflagging in the last swift moving in the leaves, / August stashed in the crisp piles above the dust. / I may find no way at all without your sleek taking." When the speaker tells us, earlier, "By now I know better. I come back," the last clause has more than the force of a return to some important remembered thing. It is also a reappearance—"I come back." In

forgetting the body the lyric self is abolished; in remembering, in returning, the lyric self may be reconstituted, may come back. It is this that is the lyric's most powerful surprise, and one that takes us over and over: that the lyric body, lifted up each time, is the lover that may ward off time and death even as we draw inexorably nearer to them:

Under the wrinkles that tell you no, I can hear you now  
saying, "I still love you," and to time, "Leave her alone."

This, finally, is what poetry is for. As Philip Levine tells us in "Making Light of It":

I can follow the day  
to the black rags and corners it will  
scatter to because someone always  
goes ahead burning the little candle  
of his breath, making light of it all.

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## WHEN ARE WE TAKING OURSELVES TOO SERIOUSLY?

### ELOUISE BELL'S HUMOR

Patricia T. Coleman\*

The publication of Elouise Bell's *Only When I Laugh* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990) is happy news indeed for those of us who have, over the years, enjoyed her columns in *Network*. It is especially happy news at this time of the year when we have just been through the holidays and, in typical Salt Lake City fashion, are in the midst of what may turn out to be a rather extended temperature inversion. Suffering as we all are right now from what Elouise Bell calls "afterburn"—that complex of mopping-up chores that accompany so many otherwise pleasant activities—like Christmas—I discovered that January in Utah is just the time to make this book my constant companion. For Elouise Bell not only knows when to laugh, she knows what is funny—at least to people like me. She seems to understand better than most people that humor—really important humor, that is,—is profoundly serious.

By that, I don't want to suggest that her humor is black, depressing, or sardonic. On the contrary, she understands that humor is best when it is a kind of gentle, self-correcting wisdom born of penetrating self and social analysis. Her language moves from the precise to the broadly suggestive, exploring, like all good humorists, the nuances of hyperbole. I do not think that it is saying too much about the essays in *Only When I Laugh* to say that they are therapeutic: indeed, her lively self-deprecating style reminds us when we are not taking ourselves seriously enough as well as when we are taking ourselves far too seriously.

On every page and in every essay in the collection, I found myself: it was as if Elouise had written this just for me. I suppose that, like Elouise, I too am a Mug-wump, a "person [according to the essay by the same name] who sits with 'mug' on one side of the fence and 'wump' on the other" (4), an interesting

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discovery for a woman who, only in Utah, can be safely called a feminist. This discovery follows upon a very recent visit to London where, having declared that I was indeed a feminist, I found myself under verbal assault by three or four otherwise quite civil English gentlemen who, having just read Germaine Greer's observation in the *London Times* that no real feminist ought "to consider it a good day until she had insulted six men," quite naturally assumed that my brand of feminism—I call it "Utah feminism"—was identical with, God save us, English academic feminism, Oxford-style.

The shock of that experience sent me back for comfort to Elouise's "Mug-wump" essay. Here she reminded me that we are all of us fence sitters of one kind or another, that being a fence sitter is more than just political expedient (especially in foreign countries), it is also philosophically necessary because we are always, if we are thinking people, amending our positions on the basis of new insights. She also reminded me that we are all seeking the same things—like freedom from pigeon-holing, freedom even from misdirected verbal assaults; we just do it under different names and guises.

In another essay, Elouise reminds us:

The problem with Nice isn't that it's sometimes wimpy; the problem is that Nice can be dangerous. More crimes have been committed behind the mask of niceness, than behind all the ski masks worn to all the convenience store stickups ever perpetrated. (40)

I remember what "nice" meant when I was in college. It was how we described the girl for whom we were trying to arrange a blind date. The guy would ask, "Is she pretty?" To which we would respond, "She's great, a really nice girl. You'll like her." Of course, if she had been pretty, we all knew that we would have said, "She's great, really pretty. You'll love her." At Holy Names College, "nice" was the blind date kiss of death, and the men from St. Mary's College knew that. Elouise reminds us:

Nice flies under false colors, wants the reputation of the gentle dove without the wisdom of the wise serpent. It is the Great Imposter, having none of the power of Virtue but seeking the influence thereof. Nice is neither kind, nor compassionate, neither good nor full of good cheer, neither hot nor cold. But, being puffed up in its own vanity, it is considerably more dangerous than lukewarmth. (46)

I suppose what we Holy Names women ought to have said to the St. Mary's men when they asked us if so-and-so were pretty was, "You'd better be awfully handsome because you are really very shallow." What Elouise knows is that niceness is more than just blind-date politeness. It "edits the truth, dilutes loyalty, makes a caricature of patriotism. It hobbles Justice, short-circuits Honor, and counterfeits Mercy, Compassion, and Love" (41).

She also seems to know, better than most of us, what other words do. All this time I thought our household was the only place in the world where *zucchini* is a swear word in July and August. I have heard my children say, "Do we have to have the Z-word for dinner again tonight?" And I have felt vaguely toward neighbors who drop off sacks of unrequested *zucchini* on my doorstep as I do towards students who want to know if we are doing anything important in class today. In fact, I consider unrequested *zucchini* a kind of Mormon terrorist activity, subtle maybe, but profoundly effective.

Actually, *Only When I Laugh* is a collection of observations about words—all kinds of words—and what these words do and do not mean, what they do and do not do. And in each case, we get a whole new perspective on our language. For example, I'm with Elouise on the word "patriotism." If we can have "patriotism," why not "matriotism"? If patriotism is about the world, Elouise tells us, matriotism is about the earth (17-19). Remember her? She's the thing that we have to save first, because the world won't be worth saving if the earth is dead.

And I'm with her on a few other things, too. When was the last time you really read the name of an apartment building, a lipstick, or a car? You can be sure that the building called Hillside Pines Terrace Gardens (and in which I lived when I first came to Utah), is none of the above. In fact, it is quite comfortably situated on nearly level ground near the corner of P Street and Third Avenue. I guess Mr. Tracy didn't think "Nearly Third Avenue" or "Still on P" were good enough names for his apartment complex. I know that the lipstick I use—Midnight Mocha Madness—is much more like Hardy's description of life than it is like any kind of madness: neither life nor my lipstick are going to deliver what they incipiently promise, else I might expect tonight an evening of passion in Paris rather than what is to be my fate—a set of freshman themes. And cars—there's something else, Elouise, to look at. Did any of you ever drive a Reliant? Was it?

Like Elouise, I, too, am tired of newspeak, whether it comes out of the mouths of my daughters or my vice president. In "Liberating the Language" (81-83), Elouise points out that in a world where Danish pastry becomes just plain Danish, chaos is not far behind. What, for example, are we to do with the term "rubber stamp"? Does "He's just a rubber stamp" become—oh, well, never mind. Not too many years ago, as I was driving a carload of junior high school girls home after school, I heard one say, "Well, Emily, good-bye; it's been real." I inquired of my daughter, "Real what?" You can guess her response. Nevertheless, I was undaunted. I wanted to be part of the group. She was, after all, my first child and one wants to do the ridiculous when one doesn't understand the consequences. So the next time we dropped Heather off, I turned to Heather and said, "Good-bye Heather; it's been." I figured that if less was more, even less was the most. Wrong. Of course, the trouble with trying to be like other people, especially those younger than you, is that you never know where to stop. Apparently I had left too much out. That's pretty much how I feel when I order

a Danish and get a pastry. What I really want when I order a Danish is not a Danish pastry but a Danish man.

Elouise Bell reminds us throughout her collection about the power of the word—abused power and underused power. As she herself points out in the same essay, "Mark Twain said that the difference between the right word and the almost right word was the difference between lightning and the lightning bug" (82). Or, in my case, the difference between the pastry and the person. It is in that light that you must read "Greeting Cards," especially if you feel about them as I do. I figure that there must be an inverse relationship in the real world between fresh, crisp language and income. And as a Catholic, I'm convinced that a just God has a special kind of purgatory for the perpetrators of all that awful passionless purple prose passing for poetry. Do you know how much people get paid to write the insides of those cards? A lot. Do you know how much anyone in this audience ever made off his or her words? Not much, I expect. Anyway, tired of reading those "warm fuzzies" (as my children call them) that you find on the typical store-bought greeting card? Tired of a world in which you not only don't have to write what you want to say, you don't even have to think it? Great, get in line behind Elouise and me. But as Elouise tells us, we don't have to settle for imitating California, where people are now hiring themselves out to hold the hands of the dying elderly who find themselves abandoned in rest homes. As Elouise says, you should "care enough to send your very self" (86).

She scoffs at trends—those tony trends—like being color analyzed ("Call Me Indian Summer," 97-99). You remember color analyzing: it's what the rich people who aren't smart enough to know what colors look good on them and who have too much time on their hands do to find out just what colors do, in fact, look good on them. Those of us in academe will love this essay. We don't make that kind of money and we don't have that kind of time. And we'll love anyone who points out to us the ludicrous behavior of that affluent leisure class which we scorn chiefly because we do not belong. But why not? In a world where people pay perfectly good money to find out that they are a "Spring" and not an "Autumn," Elouise suggests that we ought to have more options than just the four seasons. Elouise says she thinks of herself most of the time as a "Monday Morning" (98). Personally, I'm a "3:05 Weekdays." That's the time I own between the junior high carpool and the elementary school carpool and which I reserve for writing in my cheap Osco-Drugstore-Imitation-Franklin Dayplanner the things which I should have done but didn't before 3:00 and ought to do but probably won't after 3:00.

But underneath all this, as underneath all her insights, are important and profound truths. We live in a world of power ties and padded shoulders. I think I agree with my father: the world was a far more interesting place when other things than shoulders were padded. Elouise wants us to know that we live in a world which dresses for success and which worries about it. We live in a world where women are actually beginning to believe that men won't take them seriously in the corporate marketplace if they are wearing

open-toed shoes. Someone ought to tell those women that men won't, for the most part, take them seriously in the corporate marketplace even if they are wearing combat boots. Someone ought to tell them that being a liberated woman is more than the right to wear padded shoulders and become the CEO of some semi-ethical business. And someone ought to tell the men who are wearing all those power ties to take them off; a lot of us think men are already too scary.

In fact, the world we live in is already too scary, and it takes someone like Elouise to make that clear. She reminds us that we don't listen to what other people say. We don't listen to what is said to us. We don't even listen to what we say. We have only to look at Elouise's essay, "The Meeting," to appreciate her penetrating wit. She turns accepted Mormon clichés—indeed, any clichés of custom and thought—upside down and inside out. And her language in doing this is eloquent. In her marvelous parody of the church meeting, she reports that Sister Amanda Ridgely Knight will discuss "The Role of Man: Where Does He Fit in the Eternal Plan?" and Sister Alice Young Taylor will lecture on "Three Important Men from Church History" (13). Now, I've never been to a Mormon meeting, but I have been to my share of Catholic ones, and I am here to tell you that we Catholics haven't yet come up with three important women in church history. In short, this parody, while clearly a Mormon parody, is a lesson to all of us who are products of and participants in patriarchal religions. I especially liked the discussion of "What We Look For in Boys We Date" (13). I know in my high school, in a course called "What Boys Look For in Girls They Date," we were told that every man wants to marry a virgin. What I wanted to know was why, then, all the boys I knew were so busy every weekend de-virginizing the population.

Elouise's kind of humor doesn't settle for easy one-liners or take cheap shots. She understands the power of language; and even when the wit is sharp, it is elegant.

WANDERINGS AND WONDERINGS:  
CONTEMPORARY AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL THEORY  
AND THE PERSONAL ESSAY

Valerie Holladay\*

In the film *A River Runs Through It* and in the novella of the same name, the father of author Norman Maclean observes to Norman, "You like to tell true stories, don't you," and Norman answers, "Yes."

His father tells him, "After you have finished your true stories sometime, why don't you make up a story and the people to go with it? Only then will you understand what happened and why." (113).

Years later Norman Maclean did write about his family in a collection of autobiographical stories. It is interesting to me that although Maclean may have written to understand, he writes about not understanding, yet loving anyway. As his father says, "It is those we live with and love and should know who elude us." Norman Maclean didn't understand the people he loved in life, he says, and yet still he "reach[es] out to them" (113). I believe he does this, and we can do this, through writing.

Norman Maclean's stories can be read as autobiography, as fiction, or as personal essay: as autobiography, because he writes of his own experience; as fiction, because he cannot--nor can any author--precisely and accurately portray events as they happened, but only as he *remembers* them; and as personal essay, because writing is his attempt to understand, to reach out to those that he loved through writing.

Writing to me is reaching out; and while some may choose to reach out through other mediums, I prefer the personal essay, with its roots in the French word *essayer*, to try, to experiment, even to risk and "to leap," as Philip Lopate says, "experimentally into the unknown" (76).

The personal essay is also "reaching in" in a "search for one's inner standing," says Roy Pascal, author of *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (182). "The life is represented in autobiography [and, I would add, in the personal essay as well], not as something

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established but as a process; it is not simply the narrative of the voyage, but also the voyage itself. There must be in it a sense of discovery" (160). In her collection of autobiographical essays, *Refuge*, Terry Tempest Williams writes "to create a path for [her]self" (4). The destination is unknown, but the essay allows her to wander and to wonder. If I know precisely where I am going, if I know exactly what I am going to say, I miss half the journey; I know my destination, I have no need to consider other possibilities. In the same way, an autobiography or essay that "appears as an exposition of something understood from the outset [is] a failure, a partial failure at any rate" (qtd. in Fleishman 11-12).

Williams says further that she writes "in an attempt to heal [her]self, to confront what [she] do[es] not know" (4). Another autobiographical writer, Frank Conroy calls his collection *Stop-Time*, because his writing is an act of stopping time long enough to figure things out. Like Williams, Conroy writes because of his "faith in the act of writing" (ix-xi), his faith in its healing power. In all of these examples, the personal essay is an example of autobiographical writing, a kind of writing that provides "a second reading of experience," one that "adds to experience itself consciousness of it" (Gusdorf 38).

In a humorous analogy, Elouise Bell compares writing to unpacking. Packing for a weekend, a week, a ten-day hike in the wilderness, is a breeze, she says. But unpacking leaves one in bewilderment staring at a closet that doesn't have room for everything that was there before the trip. That is because "the real unpacking from a journey doesn't have to do with clothes, toiletries, and accumulated souvenirs. It has to do with experiences, insights, inner changes--what we went away hoping to see and do, what actually happened, [and] what we lost along the way" (38-39). Writing, she continues, allows us a place to put what we have gathered along the way.

Both autobiography and the personal essay are deeply rooted in our literary heritage. The autobiography is generally attributed to St. Augustine, the essay to Michel de Montaigne. The personal essay, and particularly the autobiographical personal essay, is, I believe, a fairly recent development, at least in the Mormon community. Richard Cracroft and Neal Lambert's *A Believing People*, published in 1974, contains seven personal essays, but only one, Ed Geary's "Good-bye to Poplar Haven," could be considered noticeably autobiographical. In fact, another essayist in the collection, Truman Madsen pauses in his essay to say, "To be autobiographical for a moment . . ." (163; emphasis mine), which seems to evidence that at least he doesn't see autobiography and personal essay as synonymous.

*A Thoughtful Faith* and *Personal Voices*, both LDS collections, are primarily autobiographical essays. However, other essays in these collections appear less autobiographical narrative and more theological and philosophical explorations.

Of course, the term "personal" implies autobiographical: personal means "relating to the person." So how can "personal"--genuinely personal--not be autobiographical in some sense? However,

for the purposes of this paper, I would like to specifically discuss the autobiographical narrative essay in its relationship to criticism on autobiography.

Two of my favorite essays typify the autobiographical narrative personal essay and the personal essay which is philosophical rather than narrative. In his essay on love, faith, and miracles in *A Thoughtful Faith*, Bruce Young describes the experience of meeting his wife-to-be, Margaret Blair, and learning to love her and to see himself as lovable. The distinguishing factor is "his experience." In another favorite essay, "What the Church Means to People Like Me" in *Personal Voices*, Richard Poll describes two different kinds of Church members, both intelligent, spiritual, and loyal, who have a contribution to make to the Church. Although Richard Poll tells me what the Church means to "people like [him]," the purpose of his essay, originally delivered as a sacrament meeting address, is to examine the characteristics that distinguish two different groups within the Church, to discuss their differences, and to show how each, though different, belongs in the Church and can contribute to the kingdom. His excellent essay could be considered autobiographical in the broadest definition of the word since one could argue that his essay represents his life and "offer[s] insight into [the] author's personality, attitudes, and impressions" (Morner and Rausch 17).

Like Poll's essay, I would describe many of Eugene England's essays in *Dialogues with Myself* as theological explorations rather than autobiographical narrative. However, at least two essays, "Easter Sunday" and "Enduring," offer narratives of the author's life and could be defined as autobiographical because they contain experiences from his life.

It is important to insert here that these experiences need not be completely "true." And some may exclaim here, "Wait a minute! What is an autobiography if it is not true? Isn't it just a novel or a story?" There is a common sentiment among authors that no autobiography is completely true and no story completely false. But at least their purpose is the same. Both fiction and autobiography seek to render truth in some manner to the reader. The difference is that the autobiographer/essayist claims "ownership"--to some degree of truth of experience--while the other fiction writer does not.

When we see the word *autobiography* on the cover of a book, we may be inclined to think, "Oh, the author is writing about what really happened." But truth is a difficult achievement when writing about one's life. If we had computerlike memories of long ago events, we could perhaps rely on our memory, but a difficulty remains: it is only one memory--our memory--and one interpretation of our memories, and our interpretation of our interpretation of those long ago events. Our memories are often more indicative of who we are now and what we think now than who we were then and what really happened at that time.

One essayist distinguishes between that which is "literally true" and that which is "fictively true" (England 153). Since it is not always possible to "tell the truth," the autobiographer's

responsibility is "truth tell[ing]" rather than "truthful tell[ing]" (Lejeune qtd. in Fleishman 18). The autobiography thus becomes more than merely the retelling of the external events of one's life: it is a discovery for the autobiographer of his or her past life. This is because the act of writing is an exploration, an *essai*, an attempt to understand.

As we write, something interesting occurs. In looking for meaning, we create it; in seeking order, we design it. This is because autobiography is "at once a discovery, a creation, and an imitation of the self" (Olney 19). Of this kind of "creationism," Mary McCarthy says, "I suppose everyone continues to be interested in the quest for the self, but what you feel when you're older, I think, is . . . that you really must make the self. It's absolutely useless to look for it, you won't find it" (quoted in Niebuhr 314). When we set about to write autobiography, we create a new order to the pattern of our experiences, and we create a new person: the one who writes about a life rather than the one who lived it. "In the act of remembering the past in the present, the autobiographer imagines into existence another person, another world, and surely it is not the same, in any real sense, as that past world that does not, under any circumstances, nor however much we may wish it, now exist" (Olney 241).

It is strangely comforting to create a new persona, one who is wiser and stronger than we were or one who has learned not to take life so seriously as we did when we were younger. When I wrote "Companionship," an essay about my mission, I could feel compassion for the first time for the missionary narrator I created. She was so young and naive going into her mission, pumped full of enormous expectations. I didn't create her on purpose nor did I write that essay to tell about my mission; it was a writing assignment to tell about an exotic place I'd been. The only place I could think of was France, although the culture really hadn't seemed so very foreign to me. (It was the mission that brought on culture shock!) As I wrote, I learned to care for and to forgive this fragile young missionary in a way that I had not learned to forgive myself. And this is the reason we write--"perhaps the prime motive--perhaps, indeed, the only real motive of the autobiographer"--"to redeem" our past (Olney 241). We have a chance to "win back what has been lost" (Gusdorf 39).

I believe writers write to put things in place, and autobiographers and personal essayists perhaps more than any other writers because we deal with our subject--our lives--so directly. This is because we follow "the law of gathering in":

In recounting my history I take the longest path, but this path that goes round my life leads me the more surely from me to myself. . . . It is the law of gathering in and of understanding acts that have been [mine] and all the faces and all the places where [I] have recognized signs and witness of [my] destiny. (Gusdorf 38)



Norman Maclean writes about his family, his life, to understand what happened. Mary Bradford describes writing as the "search for authenticity and wholeness, . . . the desire to reach out without striking out" (11). Alfred Kazin writes "to make a home for himself, on paper" (88). Essayist Joan Didion writes "to find out what [she's] thinking" (1016). And as we write, we gain, "by the very act of seeking, that order that [we] would have" (Olney 4).

Other essayists echo this sense of pattern-making. Writing creates order, says Richard Selzer, a surgeon-essayist who writes in the long night after long days in the operating room. "Surgery and writing are more alike than they are different," he says. "In surgery, it is the body that is being opened up and put back together for repairs. In writing, it is the whole world that is taken in for repairs, then put back in working order, piece by piece" (9).

My first experience with the personal essay came in Gene England's LDS literature class in my first year of graduate school. I was amazed at the power of writing to transform ugliness and chaos into grace and beauty. As I wrote, I was surprised at the things I wrote that I didn't know I was going to write. I began simply by describing my mother's shopping sprees to the Deseret Industries for dolls. And I was surprised by what appeared subsequently, in bits and pieces right up to my conclusion, in which I described a mother who is too talented, too busy, and too caring, one who directs all her love and energy to boxes of old, secondhand dolls. The editor working on my essay asked how my family felt about my writing, then quickly added, "Or don't they read your essays?" implying, I believe, that I would not show my essays to protect them from hurt.

Yes, my family does read my essays. My most recent essay, "Street Symphony," is about my mother's "street life" and my family's response to her. This essay has caused some pain, which I hope will yield in time to healing, but that first essay had a fairly immediate, miraculous effect on my mother, who saw herself for the first time as too talented and too loving, rather than what she had always believed: that she wasn't enough of anything. And I believe the essay was healing for my family as well.

I believe it is significant that more than one prophet of God has told us to write our life stories, our personal histories, or in other words, our autobiographies. As others have read my stories, they have shared their stories with me. And as I've read the stories of Ellis Shipp, of Mary Goble Pay, and others, particularly in the early days of the Church, I feel blessed by and thankful for these women and others like them. As I've read essays written by others, I've felt admiration, kinship, and comfort in knowing that an individual has lived and survived and grown from experiences that are painful to even read. I respect a writer whose imagination and sensitivity can create a story about suffering, about loss; I admire and revel in exquisite fiction. At the same time, when excellent fictional techniques are combined with the author's experiences, I feel I walk more closely with the author. And for myself, in writing personal essay, I feel the added benefit

of examining my life.

True, my explorations are a blend of "memory and introspection and even *imagination*". . . ." (Morner and Rausch 17; emphasis mine), as are most personal essays and autobiographies. Still, autobiography serves to reveal our personal struggles and wonderings, our longings for wholeness, our lack of understanding. The vulnerability of the personal essay creates a redemptive power that, I believe, is less characteristic of other forms of fiction. David Bradley says of his father-preacher, "In confessing his own weakness my father . . . found access to a hidden source of power inside, or perhaps outside, himself. In any case it was a source of power that was magical and mystical" (78). Bradley continues that before that time, he thought "the writer's goal was to reveal truths in words manipulated so effectively as to cause movement in the minds and hearts of those who read them." He concludes, "What I hadn't understood was that it would cost anything. I thought I could do those things while remaining safe and secure in myself" (78-79).

I believe that the personal essay is one of our most demanding literary forms. At least it is for me. Philip Lopate says the essay "liberates the writer. . . and allows one to ramble in a way that more truly reflects the mind at work" (75), but I believe that like all freedoms, we must pay the cost. While our memory may not permit us to write accurately of the events in our lives, we can and must, nevertheless, write *honestly*. Essayist Clifton Jolley says that the essay has the power of directness, which makes up for what it lacks in the way of the "formal elegance of poetry" and "the rich textual elements of fiction." I agree that the essay allows us to be direct, to both reveal and confront ourselves, but many essays I have read include the grace and poignant beauty of the best of literature. To make our language as vivid as our experience, we must be completely vulnerable. In so doing we must relieve the experience, "face the beast, naked and alone," and pay the cost (Jolley 138).

In a world that is often too busy to be introspective, and as followers of a scholarship that often privileges the mind over the heart, I believe we must accept the cost to *essai*. It is the courage to be vulnerable that will make the personal essay, as Gene England has said, "the most important contribution [of LDS writers] to the wider world literary culture" (England 154). The personal essay is capable of making this contribution because of its membership in a powerful family that includes autobiography, biography and, in our community, Mormon history as well, all of which are "forms of spiritual autobiography" (Cracroft and Lambert 9). I have read many essays that show the author's spiritual battles, those battles of the heart and mind that accompany our mortal experiences, like Gene England's "Easter Weekend," Carole Coombs Hanson's "Death of a Son," and Steve Walker's "Like There's No Tomorrow."

For me, the essay has not only demanded greater sensitivity and artistry in language, it has been an exercise in faith, in charity, and in understanding. I can see more meaning in the events

in my life--even if I am the one who creates the meaning and puts it there. "The only important part of life," says one writer, "is the regathering. When everyone understands this . . . , everyone will write. . . . Each [of us] will read [ourselves]. And [our] own life will become more clear" (Italo Svevo qtd. in Fleishman 4).

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## S. DILWORTH YOUNG: HIS LIFE IN WORDS

*Benson Y. Parkinson\**

S. Dilworth Young, my grandfather, was born in Salt Lake City on September 7, 1897. His father, Seymour B. Young, Jr., a salesman for the Consolidated Wagon and Machine Company, was a frustrated amateur musician. His mother, Carlie Louine Clawson Young, was a daughter of Hiram Clawson, whose varied career included managing the Salt Lake Theater. Dilworth's boyhood was spent in homes near Liberty Park and the lower Avenues.

When Dilworth was fourteen, before he could complete his first year in the high school program at Latter-day Saint University, his father's health failed, and the family spent the next year and a half staying in an unlined summer cabin in Mountain Dell, where they could live rent-free. The father improved enough by the fall of 1913 to move the family to Sugarhouse.

Dilworth lacked tuition for LDSU, so he registered at Granite High School, where he became student body president and a standout on the football and basketball teams. He worked summers pitching hay and riding herd on various ranches in Utah and Idaho. Later he worked on the railroad. For a variety of reasons, he passed up an appointment to Annapolis but served in the 145th Field Artillery during World War I, though he never saw combat. Dilworth served a mission to the Central States under Samuel O. Bennion, spending the winter of 1919 without purse or scrip in backwoods Louisiana. That summer, with three other elders, he reopened New Orleans, then spent two and a half years in the office in Independence, Missouri, two of them as mission secretary, a position equivalent to assistant to the president now.

Dilworth kept a war diary, which is full of the languor of waiting for shipping orders. He muses, he writes doggerel, he composes sketches of a soldier's life, both lived and as he imagined it on the front. He longs to emulate A. G. Empey, an Ogden native who joined the British army early in the war and published his memoirs with a New York house in 1917. The journal ends abruptly when Dilworth reaches Europe. Soldiers were forbidden to keep diaries lest they fall into enemy hands. Dilworth

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\*Benson Y. Parkinson, a graduate of Brigham Young University in comparative literature, is the author of *S. Dilworth Young (American Fork, Utah: Covenant, 1994)*. Quotations in this paper are cited parenthetically from this biography. This paper was presented at the Association for Mormon letters annual meeting, January 22, 1994, Westminster College, Salt Lake City.

also kept journals during his mission. These, like his war diary, are somewhat patchy and typically leave out the details he emphasized when telling the stories later. Nevertheless, they take phrasing seriously and give a fair picture of life on the ground. Dilworth practiced himself at writing elsewhere. Friends remember his modified lyrics to popular songs, also his Ma and Pa letters in Louisiana vernacular that circulated about the mission. His journal mentions an original dramatic reading at an MIA contest and records poetry, both serious and doggerel. One effort was published in the *Liahona*, the biweekly distributed to missionaries in the United States and Canada. "At last something which I've written has been put in that paper," he notes with satisfaction (91).

After his release, Dilworth worked as a clerk at the Bamberger railroad and later at Deseret Book, while he courted Gladys Pratt. They married in 1923 and set up house in Ogden. In preparing my biography of Dilworth, I came to think that its most compelling story is his lifelong courtship of my grandmother. Gladys was artistic, high-strung, intensely romantic. Dilworth, though creative, considerate, and a dreamer, was rough and plain, and consistently misunderstood her, though he never stopped trying. Dilworth commuted on the train to work until that fall, when he was hired as chief executive of the Boy Scouts of America's Ogden Gateway Council. Dilworth had not been a Scout or a Scouter, but it did not take him long to grow dissatisfied with the classroom-style camp the council had been running. He turned the program on its ear, had the boys make camping equipment and got them out of the cabins and into the hills. Camp Kiesel, on the South Fork of the Ogden River, became more of a base camp than anything, with expeditions ranging from Bear Lake and Logan Canyon on the north to Camp Steiner in the High Uintahs on the south.

Dilworth's daughter Leonore remembers him speaking almost weekly at sacrament meetings all over Weber, Davis, Morgan, and Box Elder counties. Dilworth became a storyteller and could have the boys laughing or shivering at will. His version of the Wendigo was particularly bloodcurdling. His Jim Sanders cycle, about an old trapper whose ghost haunted the lodge at Kiesel, had the boys out scouring the countryside for old Jim's bones. In another story, a pair of loggers on a sledge are chased by a pack of wolves. Each time the wolves approach, a logger shoots the lead one. The other wolves quickly tear it to pieces, then take up the chase again, and again the logger shoots, until just one wolf is left. "And you should have seen his sides flap as he came around the bend!" (124)

Gladys' interests lay in puppetry, plays, and pageantry, with Dilworth along for the ride. Small productions for wards, schools, hospitals, the Rotary Club, and the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers grew into larger productions on the water at Camp Kiesel and on the west lawn of the Young home on 24th Street and Taylor Avenue in Ogden. Gladys wrote her own narration. Leonore remembers, "She always wrote very, very flowery [language], and

much too much, and my father was the one that cut them" (191). Gladys staged three Pioneer Day pageants in Ogden Stadium. The last and largest, in 1941, had a budget of \$12,000, and involved a cast of 1,500. Gladys kept the eye moving and insisted on the details, preferring to leave scenes out if she couldn't make them authentic. Ena Barnes, an assistant, teased her that such-and-such a detail only lasted a minute. Gladys told her, "The sunset only last[s] for a minute, but it's one of God's most beautiful creations" (194). Dilworth's and Gladys' children, Young Dil and Leonore, sang, danced, wrote poetry, and became involved in drama. Young Dil's letters home from the army consist mostly of verse: sonorous, full of fantastic nature imagery, often to the exclusion of news.

Dilworth was called to the First Council of Seventy in 1945. From 1947 to 1951 he served as president of the New England Mission, where, almost unheard of in that day, he sent the elders out without purse or scrip. Back home, he spoke at least weekly, at stake conferences, at BYU, and in various other venues. He published regularly in the *Improvement Era*: yarns, travel logs, doctrinal articles, and poetry. He slept less than when he was younger and wrote in the early morning, partly to fill the hours. Dilworth had always been a voracious reader: while walking, at stoplights. Gladys teased him when he took up writing: "I wondered when all those things you were putting in were going to come out" (251). Dilworth's first book, *An Adventure in Faith*, was published in 1956 after appearing in serial form in the *Improvement Era* under the title "High Adventure." This same series is currently running in *Latter-day Digest*, whose publisher, Larry Barkdull, I understand, has plans to reissue it. In this work of fiction, Jed Colby, age sixteen, is shanghaied from London's streets, forced to become a sailor, then shipwrecked off the coast of Texas. He makes his way to Santa Fe, where he falls in with the Mormon Battalion and shares their adventures. "Written for boys," this book hearkens in spirit to two of Dilworth's old favorites, James Fenimore Cooper and Horatio Alger. Sometimes weak in style and characterization, Dilworth is at his best when he gives the details of Scouting: signal fires, Indians disguised as trees, tripe soup, sure-footed mules. Perhaps his most basic insight is that the life of a saint is not boring. As he writes in the introduction, "the greatest adventures have been had by those who love the Lord."

*Family Night Reader* appeared in 1958, followed in 1959 by *More Precious than Rubies*. These are collections of doctrinal lessons in simple language for young readers. The latter, on priesthood, filled a need for a gift book for boys being ordained deacons. It has gone through well over a score of printings and remains in print today. Dilworth in these books shows a knack for striking analogies. Also, over and over, he bears testimony in simple, plain, uniquely understandable ways. *Here Stand I--Looking*, a collection of his poetry, was not published until 1963 but gathered poems from as early as 1945. Elegies for the most part, mostly in blank or free verse, some are powerful and subtle

in the progression of their emotional imagery. Some are prosaic, sermonesque, replacing images with ideals. All are accessible, almost to the point of sentimentality, but not manipulative. If Dilworth cites ideals, one must remember how much honor and ideals meant to him. He counseled his grandchildren, "Always set your ideals high. You won't reach them all, but you'll go higher than you would have if you didn't have any" (252). Some of the best poems are written to his son, Dil, Jr., who was killed in action in World War II.

**"The Adjutant-General Regrets to Inform You . . ."**

Last night I dreamed that you were home again,  
Forgot the eight long years you've been away.  
I watched the evening firelight on your face,  
Your hands entangled in old Brownie's hair,  
Your dog, contented, now that you were there.

You felt the texture of the new rugs on the floor,  
Laughed at your sister's picture on the wall,  
Approved the new upholstery on the chair,  
Warmed to the warmth of color in the hall--  
Smiling and nodding enjoyment of them all.

Then you climbed the stairs.

I thought you liked the way we'd kept your room.  
One readies rooms against a boy's return;  
Imagines what he'd like to see and feel  
When he comes home again--  
The bed placed there, the table there, the walls  
The color that he loved--and on the  
Table in its leather box the schoolboy honors won.

Hours seemed to pass--I tiptoed to your bed,  
And heard your gentle breathing, even, faint.  
(Surely this doesn't sound like one who's dead!)  
Put out a hand to touch your brow  
But hastily withdrew it, lest I break  
The rhythm of your being home--but now,

Today, we wander aimlessly about the empty house  
Here are the roses brought in memory of you.  
There is your boyish picture on the wall  
(The ivy from a vase along the frame just so.)  
The purple heart is in its box of blue  
Beneath some lines that Joan wrote long ago:  
    "So keep his heart fed with familiar things;  
    No sound of tears  
    Flaw the clean air where his tall shoulders lift.  
    His laugh may stir



The valleyed quiet some immortal day,  
And we be easy, feeling him home again."<sup>1</sup>

Gladys's grief at her son's passing kept her bedridden for a year after his death. The depth of her suffering shows in the intensely lyrical passages she addresses to him in her journal. Gladys suffered a stroke in 1959 and occupied herself for some time writing of her childhood in the Mexican colonies and on the Pratt ranch in the Sierra Madres. These charming stories, which were almost lost, I hope to edit into a children's book in the next two or three years. As her condition worsened, she abandoned the stories but continued to write, scribbling out all her prayers, suffering, nervousness, and boredom on page after tortured page. Dilworth nursed her tirelessly for five years, at one point moving his office home. Leonore says, "I don't know what lesson my mother had to learn with that ordeal . . . I just know it turned my dad into an angel" (268).

Dilworth accepted few social engagements, which left him all the more time to write. In 1961 came *The Testimony of Mary*, a pamphlet based on a speech he gave at the general Sunday School conference, in which he tells the Christmas story from the point of view of James, the Lord's brother. This pamphlet was recently reissued by Keepsake Paperbacks. Dilworth continued, too, writing poems and varied articles in Church magazines, several of these last on Brigham Young. The articles reflect Dilworth's research for his books from the period. *Young Brigham Young*, a part-fictionalized account of Brigham's childhood, illustrated with Dilworth's own drawings, was published in 1962. This was Dilworth's second novel for young readers, and shares *An Adventure in Faith's* strengths. His history is authentic, and his conjectures strike the reader as plausible. *Young Brigham Young* is

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<sup>1</sup>Written February 18, 1952, published in *Improvement Era*, May 1952, 308 and reprinted in *Here Stand I--Looking!* 2-3. The lines by "Joan" were written by Joan Allred, Gordon T. Allred's sister. The Allreds were family friends, and Joan was Dil, Jr.'s, classmate and personal friend. Joan read the poem from which the lines are taken, "For a Young Soldier Aged Twenty," at Dil, Jr.'s funeral, with this introduction: "Dil's was an inner power which could have led him into a very good, a creative life, if he could have returned. I somehow have the feeling that wherever he is, that place must be a little changed by his coming--by him and by all the other charming young men we knew, whom we shall not now see again. . . . I should like to read a verse which could have been written for any one of them, but was written especially for Dil." Funeral Transcript, November 25, 1944, in my possession. Joan, who died in September 1993, published several novels under the name Joan Sanders. One of these, *Other Lips, Other Hearts* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982) deals partly with her LDS upbringing, in a manner reminiscent of Judith Freeman.

smoother and more poetic than the earlier book, as Dilworth perfects the form. In 1964 appeared his full-scale treatment of young Brigham, *Here Is Brigham*, again following his great-grandfather's life through his assumption of the mantle in 1844.<sup>2</sup> In style, the book is marked by frequent, lyric asides on the landscape and seasons, gleaned surely from Dilworth's own time in New England, together with speculation on his subjects' thoughts and feelings. Dilworth wrote for a faithful audience, and saw no reason to address the more specialized concerns of professional historians. Nevertheless, he did his homework, and *Here Is Brigham* became a principle secondary source on the future prophet's early life.

Gladys died in 1964. The following year, Dilworth married Hulda Parker, general secretary-treasurer of the Relief Society. Their unique, almost comical, courtship, became the stuff of folklore in the church. (Dilworth found it awkward as a General Authority to court and so proposed before they ever went out. One apocryphal story I've heard has Dilworth finding Hulda in the "secretarial pool," covering her eyes, and saying, "Will you marry me?" to which Hulda replies, "Yes, who is it?") They traveled together on conference assignments, including early on to Toronto, Hulda's old mission field. It was during this tour that Dilworth commenced work on a long poem about Joseph Smith. The story he knew from his research on Brigham Young. This work, entitled *The Long Road . . . from Vermont to Carthage*, published in 1967, had been through nine printings by 1977, and was produced as a drama in the Promised Valley Playhouse and in various other settings as recently as the fall of 1993.

*The Long Road* is written in Dilworth's mature style. His free verse is predominantly iambic and often reads like blank verse but is made light by frequent short lines and unexpected rhymes. More regular, rhymed stanzas mark changes of mood or scene. Dilworth dwells repeatedly on the theme of persecution, making a striking connection between the Missouri mobs and Cain's secret combination in that same land.

This surely is Dilworth's finest book. If not quite epic in scope, it is true to his insight that the lives of these great men were heroic. And if Dilworth's pausing in *Here Is Brigham* to set the tone or speculate on people's thoughts and feelings weighs down the narrative, here it liberates it. The lines shine brightest when probing the hearts of his subjects--Joseph contemplating sending Hyrum back from Carthage, or earlier, Emma losing her children:

Walk with quiet step into the room,  
The darkened room.

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<sup>2</sup>Dilworth got the Young name from his great-grandfather, Joseph Young, Brigham Young's brother, but Dilworth was also a descendant of Brigham Young through his maternal grandmother, Alice Young Clawson, Brigham Young's daughter.

Emma Smith lies grieving on the bed,  
Her swelling breasts  
Find no relief, no tiny head  
To nestle or to nuzzle.  
In the next room her first born son  
Lies dead.  
His life but  
Hours old, the warming  
Spirit gone,  
The body cold.

Once more with solemn tread  
Carry to the cemetery,  
Not one new born child,  
But two. Lay them in the  
Quiet earth,  
The new turned quiet earth.  
And Emma Smith lies grieving on the bed,  
Finds no relief, no tiny head  
While Joseph holds a funeral for the  
Dead.<sup>3</sup>

Dilworth became a popular speaker. His style is humorous, familiar, rough and rhythmic, full of unexpected words and quirky turns of phrase, reminiscent of Heber C. Kimball, perhaps, or Brigham Young. He joked, he told stories, he dwelt on the deep things of the scriptures, and he laid out the gospel with striking plainness, always with some memorable slant. Many who heard Dilworth found in him an example of how to be an intellectual, an individual, and yet utterly loyal to the Church. Dilworth loved speaking at stake conferences, especially the smaller Saturday night sessions. He frequently called people out of the audience to help illustrate his points. Once he had a veiled adult, an infant, a child of eight, boys at the different priesthood ages, a missionary, and a courting couple on the stand with him to represent the different stages of life. A mannequin stood for the body prior to resurrection. He himself took the part of the old man.

Dilworth was referred to as the "old wheelhorse" by some of the other General Authorities, because of his role of transition. He pushed for many years for the organization of the First Quorum of Seventy and perhaps hastened its arrival by his willingness to step down as senior president in favor of former Assistants to the Twelve. He was among the first of the brethren to receive emeritus status, after which he served as director of the Los Angeles Temple Visitors' Center and stirred up that community with a series of pageants and cultural shows. Dilworth wrote

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<sup>3</sup>Excerpt from *The Long Road* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967), 67.

poetry all through the 1970s--light verse, love ditties, elegies, meditations, and tributes to the living prophets. Along these lines, a conference speech in October 1972 honoring Harold B. Lee blends poetry and prose, as eloquently musical as any word Dilworth ever spoke.

Dilworth also composed other long poems, one on Brigham Young from 1844 until he entered the Salt Lake Valley. Another tells the story of Adam and Eve from the preexistence through the fall and into the world. Some of his later material he self-published under the title *Thoughts of Heart and Hand* and distributed to family and friends.<sup>4</sup> His 120-page personal history, written in 1972, might have served as the core of his best book, though he never wrote it. Dilworth died of congestive heart failure in LDS Hospital in Salt Lake City, July 9, 1981.

What might Dilworth have accomplished as a writer had he not been a General Authority? This is hard to say. I know my grandfather was absolutely honest and wrote what was in his heart. I think it is likely that his efforts wouldn't have been so different if he had not held his church position. But being a General Authority certainly helped get him in print. Perhaps he would have written less if he wasn't publishing. On the other hand, I found rejections from his publisher in his files. Bookcraft wasn't about to take on works it didn't consider marketable, and the fact that Dilworth's name was known was only one factor to be considered.

So what is the significance of Dilworth's contribution? His recorded speeches have weathered well--still hold the attention. His written corpus may be seen as having helped legitimize creative work in the service of the kingdom for Latter-day Saints. I suspect one could make the case for Dilworth's being the catalyst in the shift to free verse on the *Improvement Era's* poetry page during the 1950s and 1960s, for whatever that may be worth. In my mind, though, Dilworth's most significant contributions are in the novel and the narrative poem, more than anything, perhaps, for the territory they scope out. Dilworth was first a Scout, and I think serious LDS writers will return to his two basic insights: that our past requires epic treatment and that the lives of committed Saints are not dull.

### S. Dilworth Young Bibliography

Note: In addition to the following, Dilworth published dozens of poems and articles in the *Improvement Era*, *Relief Society Magazine*, *Juvenile Instructor*, *The Friend*, the *New Era*, and the *Ensign* for which indexes exist. Brigham Young University Press

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<sup>4</sup>This includes the Brigham Young poem. Dilworth read parts of the Adam and Eve poem on May 30, 1978, at a BYU devotional. "The Eternal Conflict," *Speeches of the Year* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, [1978]), 81-89, but I have thus far been unable to find the complete manuscript.

published many of the speeches he gave there, some of which are also available in audio form from the BYU Media Services Division. The Harold B. Lee Library at BYU has several other audio recordings as well and a few unpublished speeches.

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FROM WALDEN POND TO THE GREAT SALT LAKE:  
ECOBIOGRAPHY AND ENGENDERED SPECIES ACTS  
IN WALDEN AND REFUGE

Cecilia Konchar Farr  
and Phillip A. Snyder\*

All men recognize the right of revolution; that is, the right to refuse allegiance to, and to resist, the government, when its tyranny or its inefficiency are great and unendurable.

--Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience" (389)

I crossed the line at the Nevada Test Site and was arrested with nine other Utahns for trespassing on military lands. They are still conducting nuclear tests in the desert. Ours was an act of civil disobedience.

--Terry Tempest Williams, "The Clan of One-Breasted Women" (289)

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## Definitions

It may seem a vast distance in time and place from Walden Pond to the Great Salt Lake, but with our "new historical" field glasses we can gaze clear across that distance to imagine the (un)natural well-spring of Self/Life writing which constitutes the common source of their respective articulations in *Walden* and *Refuge*. Henry David Thoreau's *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854), a classic American literary text describing a transcendental personal experience with nature and writing, has helped define the possibilities of this experience for generations of readers. Terry Tempest Williams's *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* (1991), a complex contemporary personal narrative, links the rising Great Salt Lake's encroachment on the Bear River Bird Refuge with the terminal cancer of Diane Dixon Tempest, the author's mother. Williams describes this nature/writing experience in terms which are very different from Thoreau's but which nevertheless belong to the very same pastoral tradition of literary expression. *Walden* and *Refuge* are both extraordinary exemplars of a generic mode of writing we will call "ecobiography"--that is, a life-story constructed according to a pattern divined internally through the Self's interaction with the external environment, especially Nature, the multiple exchanges between which (re)present a kind of ecosystem of the Self. All the various voices of the Self, conscious and unconscious, plus the environment within which and against which they speak, comprise the dynamic network of that Self's ecosystem.

This creation of the Self interacting with Nature in (re)constructing a Life partakes of the mainstream American literary tradition, which itself reflects the broader, chauvinistic vision of American history as a series of predestined frontier settlements and of the American as a figure of rugged individualism whose character mirrors the vast land he (gender-specific reference intended) must tame. Both *Walden* and *Refuge* offer revisionist critiques of this simplistic, binary vision of Self as antagonist to Nature, each text with its own ideology of ecobiography turning on axes of nineteenth/twentieth centuries, Eastern/Western landscapes, Transcendental/Mormon revisualizations of God, and Self/Other encounters. Further, something in their respective ecobiographical acts define Thoreau and Williams as endangered, engendered species whose assertions of Self-preservation take on decidedly political agendas, defined particularly along gender lines, as essential parts of their ecobiographies. Finally, because their textual displays inevitably include certain gaps or blind spots in the depiction of Self and Life, we read between the lines and within the margins to (de)construct their privileging of education, independence, race, class, and particularly a maternal earth.

## Ecobiography

### *Nineteenth/Twentieth Centuries*

As ecobiographies, *Walden* and *Refuge* are set in the environments of very different Americas. Written midway through the nineteenth century, *Walden* develops a naive view of Nature as an infinitely renewable resource whose wilderness appears available for everyone's economic access; *Refuge*, published a century and a half later, describes Nature as poisoned, perhaps irretrievably, by the polluted byproducts of consumer waste and warfare for which everyone is held accountable. Here Leo Marx's vision of the "machine in the garden" shifts dramatically from *Walden's* nineteenth-century train whistle to *Refuge's* twentieth-century mushroom cloud, each dominating its respective wilderness as an extreme industrial counterpoint to the pastoral ideal, revising the notion of manifest destiny from American dream to American nightmare. Indeed, *Refuge* comprehends the extremity of industrial destruction that *Walden* only hints at, for, as Marx notes, in nineteenth-century America, "the transition to industrialism was enthusiastically endorsed as the stage of history when the direction of change finally, unmistakably acquired the character of continuous, predictable progress" (37). *Refuge's* late twentieth-century critique of this "progress" reaffirms the contemporary pastoral as "particularly well suited to the ideological needs of a large, educated, relatively affluent, mobile, yet morally and spiritually troubled segment of the white middle class" (Marx 40).

In this sense of the pastoral, both texts would agree with the multiple meanings of a Thoreau quotation printed on a popular L. L. Bean T-shirt: "In wildness is the preservation of the world." This wildness operates on literal and figurative levels in each text, for their respective protagonists and environmental settings depend on "wildness"--first, for the preservation of Nature and, second, for the preservation of the Self which Nature helps construct in the best American pastoral tradition:

In the New World . . . it actually seemed possible, as never before, for migrating Europeans to establish a society that might realize the ancient pastoral dream of harmony: a *via media* between decadence and wildness, too much and too little civilization. (Marx 37)

Thoreau and Williams share this pastoral impulse toward harmony with Nature based on their common estimation of the value of wildness and on their own individual status as liminal pastoral figures. They move constantly between the lines of the civilization/wilderness binary, prototypically American in their self-possession and self-reliance within its borders, as they carefully chronicle their largely harmonic interactions with Nature. However, Thoreau's personal philosophy of economic independence based on one's cultivation of basic natural resources seems simplistic, especially when compared to Williams's philosophy of complex ecological interdependence in a time of natural resource exploitation for profit. His views do not adequately anticipate what the American economy and environment would create out of the wilderness: a wildness that can exist only in expensive private recre-



ational developments or in underfunded national public preserves.

### *Eastern/Western Landscapes*

Walden's landscape is intimately Eastern, cozily wooded and almost womblike as a "walled-in" pond with little threat of danger to the initiated. Refuge's landscape is wildly Western, harshly deserted, impossibly vast as the Great Salt Lake itself, with edges rough enough to harm even the most seasoned inhabitant. Walden seems the enclosing introvert that protects and nurtures, while Refuge seems the inhospitable extrovert that endangers and challenges. Richard West Sellars argues that the Western landscape lacks the "intimacy" of the Eastern landscape (180) but inspires a "single pervasive theme in writing about west . . . the theme of man, alone, against the grand immensity of nature--the nature of the land, reflected in his own soul" (Paul Horgan, quoted in Sellars 181). Quite simply, an environment forms the character of its people after its own image, depending primarily on what that environment requires of them to survive and prosper. For Thoreau, Nature seems open and inviting and safe, with an inherent but latent sensual intimacy, as expressed in this passage: "This is a delicious evening, when the whole body is one sense, and imbibes delight through every pore. I go and come with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself" (174). Nature's sensuality in Walden seems decidedly benign and friendly. For example, Thoreau writes of "such sweet and beneficent society in Nature . . . an infinite and unaccountable friendliness . . . [in which] [e]very little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me" (177). Walden's Eastern wildness may not really be all that wild, especially when compared to Refuge's Western landscapes.

For Williams Nature seems resistant to such intimate anthropomorphic interactions as Thoreau depicts. To emphasize this resistance, Williams anchors her text with the rising and falling lake levels, over which humans can attempt only ineffectual control. The text itself requires a complex continuity of bricolage, or of multiple hybrid combinations, for its articulation as part narrative fiction, part personal essay, part philosophical musing, and part scientific observation. The lake level notations at the beginning of each chapter reinforce for Western inhabitants of the region the message of Williams's curlews--"that you do not belong" (151)--especially on the border's edge between the Great Salt Lake and its namesake city. That edge nearly kills Williams during one of her forays into the "forbidding landscape" (259) of the salt flats: "I have a throbbing headache, which tells me I have been ignoring my own need for water. I fear I may be suffering from heat-stroke and begin to worry about getting home. Too much exposure" (260). Here, too little potable water ironically counterpoints an overabundance of the undrinkable. The Great Salt Lake's aggressive encroachment on civilization also reverses the typical pattern of civilization's encroachment on the wilderness.

In this depiction, Refuge exposes both the literal and figurative implications of the American frontier as described by

Sellars: "The frontier is, then, the meeting point between myth and the more concrete reality of the western experience, the point where Utopias and Edens begin to fade into contemporary social conditions and tensions" (172). This frontier meeting point in *Refuge* thus signifies an intersection of life and death, individually and familially and communally, for the atomic bomb in the southern Utah desert matches that Western landscape in its enormous scope of destruction, just as *Walden's* train matches its limited Eastern landscape. In short, much more seems to be at stake in *Refuge* than in *Walden*. As transformers of the wilderness, steam locomotives simply cannot compare with nuclear war engines; or, to put it another way, one can drink the waters of *Walden* but not of the Great Salt Lake. Environmental survival in the twentieth-century West remains much more uncertain than in the nineteenth-century East.

#### *Transcendental/Mormon Revisualizations of God*

The depictions of God as Creator of both of these environments, Eastern and Western, depend on revising the Puritan concept of a stern, segregating, deterministic God. Transcendental and Mormon revisions, contemporary in their early nineteenth-century origins, each feature a "personalizing" of our relationship to God, although *Walden's* deistic vision of the "great creator-artist" in Nature seems much more metaphysical or Platonic than the Mormon concept of the Godhead as three distinct individual personages--the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Nature always reveals Thoreau's God with subtle indirection, while Mormons believe that the Father and the Son revealed themselves directly to the Prophet Joseph Smith and gave him specific direction. Nevertheless Thoreau and his contemporary Joseph Smith both reform the traditionally rigid figure of God, ordered and interpreted strictly according to authority, law, and ritual, in favor of a more flexible figure which reveals itself in diverse ways to individual human beings and, often, through Nature. In effect, they reform God in their own images.

Williams does likewise, extending her own interpretation of Joseph Smith by envisioning the Holy Ghost, the great personal Mormon comforter and revelator, as a female:

I believe the Holy Ghost is female[;] although she has remained hidden, invisible, deprived of a body, she is the spirit that seeps into our hearts and directs us to the well. The "still, small voice" I was taught to listen to as a child was "the gift of the Holy Ghost." Today I choose to recognize this presence as holy intuition, the gift of the Mother. (241)

In this transformation, Williams takes the traditional Mormon doctrine of personal revelation, as established initially by Joseph Smith's First Vision, back to its origins as the ultimate revelator of deity to the individual. Thoreau, marching to the individual beat of his "different drummer," undertakes an analogous transfor-

mation of Emersonian transcendentalism in *Walden* by giving it a personal face set in a concrete earthly environment instead of Emerson's abstract realm of the ideal. Both Thoreau and Williams also make a significant shift from their respective world views to ideological action through their literal and literary life productions, particularly as they dramatize their natural "conversion" stories in their narratives. According to Marx, "the function of a world view is to provide a credible picture of reality, [and] the function of an ideology is to guide its adherents in changing that reality" (41). *Walden* and *Refuge* operate according to clear ideological motives and conclude with overtly political statements. Their respective revisioning of God, first in personal and then in public terms, creates the basis of their political action and constitutes the moral and ethical imperative for us to be "righteous stewards" over the natural world.

### *Self/Other Confrontations*

The Selves of *Walden* and *Refuge* may be situated in very different kinds of wilderness, with different gods presiding; but the voices crying out within them may be speaking to the same kind of Other, one which encompasses Nature primarily but which also includes God, family, friends, literature, history, and archeological artifacts as its constituent parts. As intertextual as these complex texts are themselves, this Other (re)presents a network of relations the Self responds to and then re-presents as part of its multi-genre textual construction. The Other is thus an external ecosystem which is also an internal egosystem. In postmodern terms, the Self constructs itself as an indeterminate, loose-bordered, dialogic entity, as much *bricoleur* as *bricolage*, or, as much producer as product. The Self defines the Other as much as the Other defines the Self. It becomes clear that the narrative "I"s of *Walden* and *Refuge* are as much constructed by Nature as they are constructing of Nature. In these ecobiographies, it is impossible to tell exactly where the Self ends and Nature begins or where Nature ends and the Self begins: ego and eco are inextricably intertwined, though ultimately separate.

The frontiers these Selves face are circumscribed as the literal borders of their own back yards (*Walden Pond* and the Great Salt Lake) and the figurative landscapes of their own psyches--nineteenth-century Eastern male transcendentalist and twentieth-century Western female Mormon; the exploration of one depends on the exploration of the other. In *Walden*, Thoreau depicts his figure of the Self as in but still somehow apart from nature and society, a self-contained individual capable of detachment and observation. His attitude seems typical of what J. Baird Callicott describes as Western European attitudes toward Nature: alienated from the natural, in an "exploitative practical relationship with it" (299). Though he makes a point of rejecting capitalism--he refuses to benefit economically by logging because, after all, it does not take much wood to make a pencil--Thoreau does focus on what he gets from being "in" Nature. He distances himself from it to make personal, philosophical use of it. He observes the depths of *Walden*

Pond through its sheet of ice. He engages the loon in a chase that is, for him, limited to the surface and dependent on a boat's mediation. He studies the villagers as if they were a town of prairie dogs and he were Emerson's transparent eyeball, apart from, even above, both the civilized and the natural worlds. Though Thoreau pushes the edges of his nineteenth-century humanist traditions, he remains a child of the Enlightenment thinkers to whom Nature was a "machine, an extension of the mind of man" (Callicott 299). In Jim Cheney's words, he overcomes the alienation of Self/Nature only by the totalization of "absorbing the other into the self" ("Eco-Feminism" 124).

In *Refuge*, by contrast, Williams depicts her figure of the Self as a naturalist both in and of Nature and society, subjective despite her scientific training and dependent on the natural and social community. Her text seems informed by Native American cultural attitudes in which, Callicott notes, the "human and natural realms are unified and akin" (302). Williams immerses herself to float in and through the Great Salt Lake. She risks her life on the lake's alkaline flatlands by venturing forth without the protection of food, water, or vehicle. In much the same way, she lies beside her dying mother to breathe with her almost as one person, and she marches with Mylar-draped women into a radioactive town. *Refuge*, in combining a history of family and place, creates a kind of frontier community composed of environment and inhabitants in a near-kinship relation, with Williams displaying Arne Naess's ideal of environmental maturity: "Increasing maturity activates more of the personality in relation to more of the milieu. It results in acting more consistently from oneself as a whole" (in Cheney, "Review," 277). Nevertheless, she still manages to maintain a distinct but slight separation of the Self from Nature as the Other, observing an essential ecobiographical difference, because to merge with Nature, according to Marx, would be to invite a "dire loss of selfhood; a merging with the nonhuman whose ultimate form is death" (57). Life, on the other hand, depends on the Self's engaging the Other ethically, without merger or totalization. Thoreau uses his objective distance to totalize Nature, subsuming it unto himself; Williams uses her subjective closeness to engage Nature, embracing it without totally subsuming it.

In the tradition of autobiographical writing, women writers often describe themselves apologetically by describing someone else, in what Mary G. Mason calls a "duo pattern." Mason explains that "the self-discovery of female identity seems to acknowledge the real presence and recognition of another consciousness, and the disclosure of the female self is linked to the identification of some 'other'" (210). Male autobiographers, on the other hand, assume a unitary cultural self-identity that seems as "natural" to them as it seems alien to female autobiographers, given their fragmented and subordinate cultural status. In this paradigm, male lives tend to be constructed directly, according to a pattern of autonomy, while female lives tend to be constructed indirectly, according to a pattern of dependency; male autobiographers focus

more on Self; female autobiographers focus more on Other. For example, though Thoreau's move toward Nature takes him into this realm of women's relational writing, his gendered identity keeps him solidly apart and self-assured: he depicts the figure of Self/Nature as Male/Female while Williams depicts it as Female/Female. The former is an essentially male figure of unity by domination and the latter a fundamentally female figure of unity by community. Thoreau looks to Nature as singular Other to his Self; Williams looks to Nature and to her maternal progenitors as multiple Others to her Self. Their respective ecobiographical "acts," then, are the acts of engendered species.

### Engendered Species Acts

Of course, the notion of "engendered species" plays on the concept of "endangered species" to call into question the nature of the autobiographical subject and to emphasize the uncertain outcome of the autobiographical project. This autobiographical subject is endangered because its presence to the reader in the autobiography is made possible by the inherent absences in the text, the absences of both the "real" Self and the Other(s) that make the "textual" Self possible. As Sidonie Smith notes in her *Poetics of Women's Autobiography*:

This genre [of autobiography], apparently so simple, so self-evident, so readily accessible to the reader, is ultimately as complex as the subject it seeks to capture in its representation and as various as the rhetorical expressions through which . . . that subjectivity reads itself into the world. (3)

In both *Walden* and *Refuge*, this complex, endangered ecobiographical subject is also engendered. Each text constructs its respective Self as distinctively masculine and feminine. These engendered Selves are created by positing different relationships to the endangered subject of postmodern autobiography. For example, Thoreau's "I" in *Walden* is very much like other male individualists we know from our American literary tradition: a complete, autonomous Self who would be destroyed by too much contact with civilized society. As Huck Finn avoids the Widow Douglas, Thoreau's "I" keeps his pure inner self separate from the "dirty institutions" that would, Thoreau writes, "constrain him to belong to their desperate odd-fellow society" (218). Significantly, these "institutions" of civilization against which characters such as Huck struggle are maintained and promoted by the influence of women. The presence of this literary and historical figure of masculine American Self, even in its absence, helps us construct the "I" of *Walden*.

The presence of this figure also helps us to construct Williams's "I" in a different way, one which emphasizes the centrality of gender in the construction. As Nina Baym posits in "Melodramas of Beset Manhood," women in this schema, from the point of view of the traditional subject of American literature, and, as

we have noted, of the broadest, chauvinistic vision of American history, have acted almost exclusively as "entrappers and domesticators" (73). They are the influence from which this subject needs to free himself. Williams's "I" of *Refuge* is a woman in a community of women, not the self-contained "I" who goes to the woods alone to "suck out all the marrow of life" (135). Williams's Self is a Self-in-Relation--in relation, that is, both to a textual community of others and to an intertextual historical and literary figure of Self which includes Thoreau. Thus, the female autobiographical project functions as a dialogic connector rather than a monologic isolator; it is about the construction of multiple Selves instead of a unitary Self; it celebrates the freedom, not the restriction, of community.

Nevertheless, while *Walden* and *Refuge* are differently engendered texts, they are, in the end, very similar in rhetorical purpose. Both are, to some extent, revolutionary ecobiographies which call for a subversion of political and socio-economic policies that deny or destroy the Self and its communities, natural and social. Their call becomes especially evident as we compare Williams's epilogue, "The Clan of One-Breasted Women," with Thoreau's essay "Civil Disobedience," which usually follows *Walden* in contemporary editions of the text and also amplifies the night in jail episode mentioned in "The Village" chapter. Both authors encourage activism against the State for a political purpose, Thoreau to end war and slavery and Williams to stop nuclear testing. Both texts end with a plea to change the world into a better place for themselves and their communities. But here, again, the act of engendering these ecobiographical Selves makes for distinct textual differences. Thoreau argues for a State with "true respect for the individual," for, he says, "there will never be a really free and enlightened State, until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly" (413, emphasis ours). Clearly, this closing passage of "Civil Disobedience" continues the theme of individualism so prevalent in *Walden*. Thoreau's soul, like Emily Dickinson's, wishes to--indeed, maintains the right to--select its own society. His basis for activism is individual conscience, the result being the creation of "man" (393), as he emphasizes, one who is "a majority of one" (397), one who "declare[s] war with the State . . . though [he adds] I will still make what use and get what advantage of her I can, as is usual in such cases" (407, emphasis ours). It is consistent with Baym's paradigm of "beset manhood" that here the State is the enemy and, not coincidentally, a prostituted female.

*Refuge* ends with a small group of women being dropped off in the desert by the local authorities as punishment for their activism; but, at home there, they remain "soul-centered and strong, women who recognized the sweet smell of sage as fuel for [their] spirits" (290). This community of women, tied to Mother Nature with a bond Williams makes metaphorically biological, have "crossed the line," literally and figuratively. These and other women seem wholly part of Williams's Clan of One-Breasted Women, a

society they could not select and probably would not have chosen. Yet, thrown together by ecobiographical necessity, their basis for activism is communal and maternal: "They would reclaim the desert for the sake of their children, for the sake of the land" (287). "Ours," writes Williams, invoking Thoreau, "was an act of civil disobedience" (289). And to the extent that her call to arms is a call for the individual to act in opposition to religious and social institutions, she is the inheritor of his tradition of ecobiography. Echoing Thoreau, she asserts, "What I do know . . . is that . . . I must question everything, even if it means losing my faith, even if it means becoming a member of a border tribe among my own people" (286). Despite this demand for individual responsibility, however, she identifies herself, not like Thoreau, as a lone man of conscience, but as a "member of a border tribe," whose identity is still plural, still multiple. And she does not invoke conscience as her prime motivator, but what she calls the "common, heroic deaths" of the women in her family (285).

### Implications

As engendered readers and postmodern theorists, we add our own critiques between the lines of these ecobiographies on issues of unexamined and unproblemitized privilege: the privilege of class that allows both writers to move in and out of Nature in comfort and ease; the privilege of education that grants both of them access to an autobiographical voice; the privilege of whiteness that gives both a sense of self-significance; and, most centrally for this project, the privilege of Western discourse that places both Thoreau and Williams in the position of Subject in opposition to an Object-Nature. Significantly this Object-Nature is, in both texts, constructed female, a construction which has undergone serious critique in recent feminist and eco-feminist criticism, beginning with Annette Kolodny's *Lay of the Land* in 1975. Kolodny argues that American mythology sees "the land as essentially feminine--that is not simply the land as mother, but the land as woman, the total female principle of gratification--enclosing the individual in an environment of receptivity, repose and painless and integral satisfaction" (4). This mythologizing and romanticizing of the land leads to inevitable disappointment and, Kolodny posits, anger. "It is anger," she writes, that "appears today as the single-minded destruction and pollution of the continent" (137). Making it female is, in our Western philosophical tradition, making it Other, the site of male dominance, the blank page he writes upon.

Williams's female land is, of course, not as radically Other as is Thoreau's. Indeed, she juxtaposes the pain of her Earth with the pain of her biological mother dying of cancer, and her narrative is filled with passages that emphasize her oneness with her mother and with Nature. But the result of her representation of Nature as Self in language is equally violent. We cannot overcome the violence of binary thinking by simply inverting the binary, by making Nature the Self. As Cheney points out, in this model, "there

is no respecting the other as other" ("Eco-Feminism" 124). And Karen Warren emphasizes, "Unity in sameness alone is erasure of difference" (137). Donna Haraway posits the possibility of human relations with nature which can "somehow--linguistically, ethically, scientifically, politically, technologically, epistemologically--be imagined as genuinely social and actively relational," yet in which "the partners remain utterly inhomogeneous" (3). We propose that ecobiography, especially in the American tradition, may be the most viable route toward this goal. As the postmodern subject/Self both locates itself within and absents itself from the nature/Other it looks toward, it locates itself in the tension between Self and Other, creating a Nature that is itself and beyond itself (while creating a Self which is in Nature and beyond it, utterly inhomogeneous). Since the postmodern autobiographical project finds the Self in flux, a tissue of competing identities, it follows that ecobiography would also place traditional definitions of Nature in question and do so with the urgency of self-preservation which typifies autobiographical work in the late twentieth century.

As we imagine a postmodern ecobiography, then, we imagine further, beyond boundaries and binaries, to an eco that is not ego, a Nature that is neither Self nor Other, neither male nor female. We imagine a postmodern mode of thinking and writing about Nature that resists violence and is actively relational. And we hope, as a result, for a Nature that is neither engendered nor endangered

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REFUGE AS EXTINCTION:  
THE VICTORY OF FEAR AND DEATH  
OVER COURAGE AND FAITH

Neal W. Kramer\*

Terry Tempest Williams's recent best-seller, *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* (New York: Vintage, 1991) has been received with high praise. Favorable reviews have produced advertising blurbs most writers yearn for. Here we have a book about courage, regeneration, and faith. In it we find new hope for a better environment, a deeper relationship between ourselves and the earth. The book is especially remarkable for its style, which encourages an intense closeness between text and reader that pulls us into the circle of the Tempest family as they face cancer and into the onslaught of the rising Great Salt Lake as it encroaches on the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge.

But while the reviewers are right about this powerful text, it also contains some surprising paradoxes, textual ruptures. For, as the text is about courage, love, and faith, its subtexts are fear and loss of faith. In fact, *Refuge* with all its implications of regeneration and survival, still succumbs to extinction and death. Two important themes, Mormonism and children, prove especially problematic. Both have the potential to enhance life and faith. But their presence in *Refuge* is an absence, an absence which generates dialectical tension and aporia, which in turn lead to rupture. The text rends as courage and faith confront their opposites in fear and doubt.

Mormon Ruptures

*Refuge's* accounts of Mormonism challenge the religion's faith in the miraculous power of priesthood. This is especially compelling when we see Diane's and Jack Tempest's faith rewarded when she survives breast cancer. But priesthood power is undercut by the text's assertions that miracles are mere magic or mirage in the face of the "infinite power" (43) of cancer, the agent of death. Closer examination of these Mormon passages reveals

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rupture, the tension between miracle and mirage.

A conversation between Terry and her husband, Brooke, introduces the tension and the implication of rupture:

"A mirage is created when the air next to the earth becomes warmer than the air immediately above it," said Brooke. [Brooke becomes the expert, the master of illusion.] . . .

"I don't believe it's a mirage," I said. "It looks like another finger of Great Salt Lake."

"It's a mirage, Ter," Brooke continued.

"So, as a result of bending light rays, the image of the sky is turned upside down. It just looks like a lake."

"I think it is the lake." . . .

"It's all an illusion. Nothing is as it appears. The air refracting the sun's rays, transforming sand into water; make sense?"

I look at him and nod. "I think it's about hope on a hot day." (85-86)

This passage relies on Brooke's sense of his mastery, which is undercut by Terry's hope. Brooke is a kind of present absence. When Terry needs him, he materializes. But when she needs to be alone, he is willingly absent.

But more than that, the passage is part of an important array of words at play in the text: *mirage*, *miracle*, and even *Mormonism*. Whether present or implied in the text, each word plays itself out against the background of Mormon beliefs, which are presented as illusions. We have the miracle of the gulls, conveniently explained away by the magic worldview hypothesis. We have the miracle of priesthood administration and prayer, undercut by the sense that, even though Diane Tempest's life appeared to have been saved by Elder Thomas S. Monson's intervention and the prayer of faith, she still died. Deep faith and lasting tradition are presented as illusions or mirages; thus, present decisions come to lack vitality as they disconnect from a meaningful and enlivened past and gaze into a future that promises refuge from pain and suffering in a sterile and finally extinct environment. One is led to wonder about the relationship between the mirages so carefully explained and the hope so courageously announced. Isn't the spoken hope as much a mirage as the sand masquerading as water? Will Diane Tempest live? Even more importantly for Mormons, will she live again?

The text seems to present the desire to live again as faith in miraculous healing. It also seems to present Mormonism as a potential source of true healing power. But intrusions undermine potential faith: "Mormon religion has roots firmly planted in a magical worldview. Divining rods, seer stones, astrology, and visions were all part of the experience of the founding Prophet, Joseph Smith" (195). Here the text wants to speak of the "founding" of Mormonism, a *non sequitur* of sorts since Mormons believe

in a restoration. A function of "founding" in this context is to render meaningless the language of restoration. The absence of restoration confounds faith. For if Joseph Smith is not the agent of restoration, then the possibility of other restorations is remote. "Yea, this bringeth about the restoration of those things of which has been spoken by the mouths of the prophets. The soul shall be restored to the body, and the body to the soul; yea, and every limb and joint shall be restored to its body; yea, and a hair of the head shall not be lost; but all things shall be restored to their proper and perfect frame" (Alma 40:22-23). Resurrection is the essence of restoration and the essence of faith. To be restored is to live again while to be founded implies a finite beginning and an unfortunate but finite end.

Almost any contemporary association of Mormonism with miracles calls forth the image of California gulls swooping down and devouring thousands of Mormon crickets. The story is ubiquitous. A colleague who spent the summer teaching in China reports that the miracle is known to all Chinese schoolchildren from their study of history, the one thing everybody knows about Mormons. It also appears in the text of *Refuge* (69-70). The story has a peculiar power, but that power is demystified by the language of mirage and magic in the following passage:

The Mormon Church declared Sunday, May 5, 1986, a day of prayer on behalf of the weather; that the rains might be stopped. The "Citizens for the Return of Lake Bonneville" also declared it a day of prayer; that the rains might continue. Each organization viewed the other as a cult.

Monday, it rained. (135)

Mormon faith and prayers turn out to be mirages, illusory hope that brings no real miracle. No gulls come to eat the crickets in modern Salt Lake City. Diane Tempest will die of cancer despite all the prayers and all the priesthood. We are left alone to build a new world on a new foundation of self over other, of child over parent, of present over past or future.

Despite what I've just said, *Refuge* is a book as much to be treasured for tender scenes as to be read for this sort of rupture. Readers must certainly be moved by the sweet scenes of family togetherness, prayer, and priesthood. Yet even those scenes of beauty and human warmth rupture as they collide with Mormonism. Each scene is undone by rupture in a slightly different sense, but still the irruption occurs.

The first scene brings the Tempest family into the living room in a communal family blessing and prayer:

At dusk, we moved inside to the living room and created a family circle. Mother sat on a chair in the center. As the eldest son, Steve annointed [sic] Mother with consecrated olive oil to seal the blessing. The men who held the Melchizedek Priesthood, the highest

order of authority bestowed upon Mormon males, gathered around her, placing their hands on the crown of her head. My father prayed in a low, humble voice, asking that she might be the receptacle of her family's love, that she might know of her influence in our lives and be blessed with strength and courage and peace of mind.

Kneeling next to my grandmother, Mimi, I felt her strength and the generational history of belief Mormon ritual holds. (34-35)

The rupture in this text is foreshadowed or announced by the carelessness of the description. First we note that "anoint" is misspelled. A careful look at the description of the ordinance also reveals carelessness. One does not anoint in order to seal a blessing. One seals the anointing and offers words of blessing as inspired by the Spirit. The text does not care to get the description right or even to spell the words correctly. The next line reveals the rupture of community and slides back into solipsism: "We can heal ourselves, I thought, and we can heal each other." Here the rupture with tradition, hinted at by carelessness before, is brought directly to our attention. There is no faith in generational ritual. Instead there is focus on self. To heal my mother is to heal me. Please don't let me have to feel this pain. And please don't let the priesthood have any real power to bless or point toward eternal life together in the circle of generational love and support. We don't need the priesthood panaceas if we only have the faith in ourselves to generate the strength each individual needs to survive.

As the story continues, we are again faced with the collision of community, tradition, and self:

After everyone left, I asked Mother if I could feel the tumor. She lay down on the carpet in the family room and placed my hand on her abdomen. With her help, I found the strange rise on the left side and palpated my fingers around its perimeter.

With my hands on my mother's belly, I prayed. (35)

This rupture reveals that the previous story of Mormon family involvement was simply a ruse, a way to prepare us for the "sacred" connection of daughter to mother. And for the "real" prayer. But this prayer is empty. To whom does the "I" in this text pray? Can it be to the Father? Does the prayer ask? Does it believe? If "we pray in the name of Jesus Christ," in whose name does the "I" pray? The disconnecting with tradition in order to reconnect with the mother is clear. But why? Here we have reached aporia in this text's uneasy relationship with Mormonism.

Another tender moment brings Terry and Diane together and invites us again to consider blessing and prayer:

The light begins to deepen. It is sunset. I open the shutters, so Mother can see the clouds. I return to

her bedside. She takes my hand and whispers, "Will you give me a blessing?"

In Mormon religion, formal blessings of healing are given by men through the Priesthood of God. Women have no outward authority. But within the secrecy of sisterhood we have always bestowed benisons upon our families.

Mother sits up. I lay my hands upon her head and in the privacy of women, we pray. (158)

Each scene of prayer and blessing focuses on the act of touching one another rather than on connecting with God. The rejection of "Mormon magic" is the acceptance of the inexorability of the mortal and the temporary. Even Terry's prayer to the seagulls (148-49) implies awareness of present mortal beings. But what has happened to faith? Will Diane Tempest live again beyond the grave? In *Refuge* there is little hope that people can escape mortality. There is little hope of reunion. There is only isolated suffering and the anguish of lost faith and empty hope swallowed by the cancer to which one finally must acquiesce. Mormonism is a patriarchal mirage in which one can place no faith, for which one has no hope.

And yet we still must grapple with the most compelling story of all: Thomas S. Monson's miraculous announcement that the breast cancer will not claim Diane, that she will live yet a long time. He told Terry's father:

"Brother Tempest, I feel compelled to tell you your wife will be well for many years to come. I would like to invite you and your family to kneel together in the privacy of your home at noon on Thursday. The Brethren will be meeting in the holy chambers of the Temple, where we will enter your wife's name among those to be healed."

Back home, our family was seated around the dinner table. Dad was late. Mother was furious. I'll never forget the look on his face when he opened the door. He walked over to Mother and held her tightly in his arms. He wept.

"What's happened, John?" Mother asked.

That Thursday, my brothers and I came home from school to pray. We knelt in the living room together as a family. No words were uttered. But in the quiet of that room, I felt the presence of angels. (197)

This passage ought to exude hope as, told with hindsight, it announces the successful blessing, the completion of all that Diane Tempest had hoped would happen for her and her children, but again we fall short of life everlasting, the essence of Mormonism. It is the apotheosis of the book, the contrast against which encroaching doubt and death work on every page to convince us that cancer is the infinite power which will devour all women

and cast them into the furnace of the desert and the jaws of Great Salt Lake, the Dead Sea of the New World. There are no angels present at the death of Diane Tempest. Or are there? Perhaps we just won't see them.

### **Maternal Ruptures: The Absence of Children**

The remarkable voice of *Refuge* is powerfully feminine and never more than in its surest maternal images. Take for example the wonderful section where Diane and Terry visit Grand Teton National Park:

Our maternal environment is perfectly safe--dark, warm, and wet. It is a residency inside the Feminine.

When we outgrow our mother's body, our cramps become her own. We move. She labors. Our body turns upside down in hers as we journey through the birth canal. She pushes in pain. We emerge, a head. She pushes one more time, and we slide out like a fish. Slapped on the back by the doctor, we breathe. The umbilical cord is cut--not at our request. Separation is immediate. A mother reclaims her body, for her own life. Not ours. Minutes old, our first death is our own birth. (50-51)

Among the most powerful in the book, this passage reveals the source of life--and death. The maternal environment is presented as safe. Yet, if the child stays too long in the womb, it will kill itself and its mother. So birth becomes a necessary separation. But the separation is never complete, for mother and child connect again. Their connection is no longer umbilical and their environment is no longer dark, warm, and wet. The dry light of mother nature creates a new bond, a connection of new sensations: sight, sound, and dry loving touch. But the implication of the passage is that the light is only an illusion. The light is the projection of the father sun that must be eclipsed by true daughter/mother love. For sooner than you think, the eternal darkness of death overwhelms the light of life.

The essence of the passage is in the body, though. The text asserts that, whether childless or mothered, the body is still a woman's own, "for her own life." And yet this text is very much about how a mother and daughter are so interconnected that one feels the other's pain long after the umbilical separation. Even in the rupture of birth we find the connection of life. Why then death? Death is the aporia beyond which we cannot argue. It is the ultimate Socratic question, the ultimate irony. This irony makes the conversation that follows so poignant:

Mother and I are in Wyoming. The quaking aspens are ablaze like the bright light of a burning match. We walk along the Gros Ventre River with the Tetons behind us. She gave me my birth story: what she experienced

during her pregnancy, what the birthing was like, and how she felt when she held me for the first time.

"I don't ever remember being so happy, Terry. Having a child completed something for me. I can't explain it. It's something you feel as a woman connected to other women."

She paused.

I asked her if she thought my life was selfish without children.

"Yes," she said. "But I'm not saying that's bad. By being selfish a woman ultimately has more to give in the long run, because she has a self to give away."

"Do you think I should have a child?" I asked.

"I can't answer that for you," she said. "All I can tell you is that it was the right choice for me."

(51)

This, the first of two conversations about Terry's choice to have no children, raises the specter of absence. As the words announce the choice not to have children, they also announce the most prominent disconnection in the text. Terry is now inexorably different from either of her grandmothers and her mother. She has spoken of herself as "matriarch," but she will have no children. This is the personal rupture of separation, of cutting oneself off. As Diane states so powerfully, pregnancy is "something you feel as a woman connected to other women." And Terry seems to want her mother to tell her to have children, to be angry with her for having made the wrong choice. But Diane refuses, inviting Terry to consider whether she wishes to be connected or to move away in isolation. Terry here denies connection with her mother. Continuity fades into discontinuity and the desire for ongoing connection disintegrates into fearful disconnection.

Still in the context of the conversation about pregnancy, on just the next page, the author announces her confusion: "I am deceiving myself" (52). And the following page is equally unclear: "Suffering shows us what we are attached to--perhaps the umbilical cord between Mother and me has never been cut. Dying doesn't cause suffering. Resistance to dying does" (53). Who is suffering here? And why? Is the attachment between mother and daughter still there or have we just witnessed the ultimate disconnection. Does not the decision to have no children (and deny her mother grandchildren by her only daughter) announce that the woman has severed the umbilical cord between her and any mother? This is a chapter of ironies and pain. Does the cancer hurt Diane Tempest worse than her daughter's decision? We have no easy answer, but *Refuge* forces us to feel the pain of separation, distance. For we witness the conclusion of the fine relationship that once was grandmother, mother, daughter and now is stopped cold. As the barn swallow dies, so will the line of Tempest women. There will be no one left to carry it further. Perhaps this chapter is as much about the suffering that comes from resistance to living as about painful resistance to dying.



In the context of their separation, Diane Tempest's fantasy about Terry's children is especially painful:

"What would you tell your children of me?" Mother asked after we had seated ourselves in the restaurant at Hotel Utah.

I unfolded my napkin and placed it on my lap. I didn't want to think about such things.

"I'll let you tell them for yourself," I answered, taking a sip of water.

She paused and placed her napkin on her lap.

"Tell them I am the bird's nest behind the waterfall. Yes, tell them that." (61)

The fantasy reveals Diane's fear. We know that the great absence in the text, which lingers ever present, is grandchildren. Not that others cannot have the grandchildren. Brothers will marry and their wives will deliver. And yet, when the mother speaks of children, the daughter reveals perhaps too much in the Freudian slip: "I didn't want to think of such things." She didn't want to think of her mother's absence. But did she want to think of absent children? Did she consider this extinction in her refuge?

Later Diane expresses her earlier fears that had been overcome by the miraculous healing:

"At thirty-eight years old, I found I had breast cancer. I can remember asking my doctor what I should plan for in my future. He said, 'Diane, my advice to you is to live each day as richly as you can.' As I lay in my bed after he left, I thought, will I be alive next year to take my son to first grade? Will I see my children marry? And will I know the joy of holding my grandchildren?" (116)

Diane's testimony is deep and beautiful. She lived to do all those things. Her life was saved. She lived as richly as possible, taking her children to school, witnessing temple marriage, hefting robust grandchildren. Her life was joyous. The joy she now will miss will be the grandchildren she will never hold because they will never be born. For motherhood, in this text, is a dead end. It kills the mother even as she perpetuates her motherhood on unsuspecting later generations. How sad that Diane Tempest's rich and fulfilling life as a mother and grandmother will not be carried on to future generations.

The next page presents an even deeper clue to Diane Tempest's maternal character. She offers the key to her ongoing life with Terry, who has rejected the fundamental principles of her mother's life: "I remember thinking, I have two choices here--I can harp on her every day of her life, making certain her room is straight--or I can close the door and preserve our relationship." (117) For Diane, staying connected is the essence of motherhood. She will strive to maintain the connection, even at the cost of

the principle of keeping a clean room, because connection is always better than disconnection. Connection is the prime principle of her motherhood. Disconnection is death, even in life, and she believes these connections will exist after death, beyond the veil of the waterfall. But where is the refuge in this maternal hope for Terry or for the benighted reader? The reader longs for new connections, joining the generations even in the face of cancer. But such connections are not to be. Instead, we find "ambivalence" about them.

The second conversation about Terry's decision is heart-rending:

"What I leave with you, Terry, is this: Follow your feelings. I have followed mine."

I asked her once again if she thought Brooke and I should have a child.

"I would hate to see you miss out on the most beautiful experience life has to offer. What are you afraid of?"

"I am afraid of losing my solitude, my time to retreat and my time to create. Brooke is as ambivalent as I am. My ideas, Mother, are my children."

"I would rather hold you in my arms than one of your books." She paused. "You asked for my opinion and I have given it to you."

"And I will follow my feelings."

She rubbed my back. "I love you so. We don't need words, do we? Do you know how wonderful it is to be perfectly honest with your daughter? Do you know how rich you have made my life? I am seeing circles, circles of love."

She took her hand off my back and turned the other way. "I need to be alone, dear." (220-21)

The pathos of the conversation is palpable. "We don't need words, do we?" One last time before she dies, Diane pleads with Terry to keep the maternal order alive. She will miss so much without babies. The natural circle of their love will be broken, worlds without end. They will have only lineage and the line will extend backward, never to reconnect in the age-old cycle as the daughter becomes mother to the woman and the woman becomes mother to the daughter. So Terry Tempest becomes a woman "rewriting my genealogy." Writing is her only means of creation, always already short of the procreation that promises, for Mormons anyway, eternal lives and family circles of love forever and forever.

### Anxious Dreams

Anxiety over children is never far from the text. As Terry wrestles with her own potential cancer, she seems afraid of what she might pass on. Should she bear children whose destiny is pain and death?

Nothing is familiar to me any more. I just returned home from the hospital, having a small cyst removed from my right breast. Second time. It was benign. But I suffered the uncertainty of not knowing for days. My scars portend my lineage. I look at Mother and I see myself. Is cancer my path, too? (97)

She seems to ask: If I have children, will cancer be their devouring lineage, too? If I have no children, will I have the last laugh on cancer, killing it as it kills me? Perhaps my mother and I will live on together forever as text, without the cancer, without the pain. Can I find refuge in the cancer, as my mother did? Or must I live in fear that it will attack and crush me again as it did before as I watched my mother die? The fear of cancer brings out the "I." In these moments of solitude, the "I" is everywhere as community shrinks and faith and hope decrease. The text falls back into its isolated anxiety even as it discovers a reason to rejoice. There is no cancer. But fear dominates the benign as well as the malignant refuge.

Even biological language becomes a shrewd though unconscious metaphor for the anxious future this book envisions for the Tempest women: "The truth is, the system isn't out there to replace. No other system on the continent can replace or absorb this wetland complex. There is a certain threshold that once crossed, we can never recover. When the death rates exceed the birth rates, we are in trouble. Nobody knows the answers. We are working with the questions" (113-14). As soon as more Tempests die than are born, they "are in trouble." Is the choice to have no children a courageous fist brandished in the face of cancerous death or is it merely the hollow whimper of hopelessness in a world bereft of faith in the abundant life?

The beginning of the book announces a dream that takes on strong significance in light of the choice to have no children. Terry awakens in a fright. Her doctor announces, "You have nine months to heal yourself" (4). She needs to have a child, as her unconscious so vividly suggests. She can heal herself in the birth of her children, as Diane claims to have done. The unhappy paradox, of course, is that she has chosen not to have children and so, in essence, has closed the only route available to her for natural healing.

Late in the story we witness another nightmare:

Mother was dead. I sat up startled and leaned against the pine headboard of our bed. Mother was alive. I wrapped my arms around myself to stop shaking from the nightmare.

But the feeling I could not purge from my soul was that without a mother, one no longer has the luxury of being a child.

I have never felt so alone. (202)

If there is a natural order to grandmother, mother, daughter

relations, it is that daughters in turn become mothers and grandmothers, keeping the lines connected. The umbilical cord connects the generations and the daughter experiences daughterhood again through her own children and grandchildren. The troubling rupture in the text is the silent absence of the next generation. So while the text is an important commentary on hopeful regeneration in the face of cruel death, it is also a text about the extinction of generations. And for me that sadness is even deeper than the natural loss of a mother, especially since Diane found the deepest meaning in her own life through her children and grandchildren and wanted the same joy for her Terry.

When Terry visits a museum and discovers there the artificially empty eggs of past bird generations, her anxiety returns. She must share it with her surviving grandmother, Mimi.

I describe my encounter with the egg collection at the museum, how disturbing it was.

"The hollow eggs translated into hollow wombs. The Earth is not well and neither are we. I saw the health of the planet as our own."

Mimi listened intently. She stood and turned sideways to switch on the lamp. It was dusk. I could not help but notice her distended belly, pregnant with tumor.

"It's all related," she said. "I feel certain."  
(262-63)

Mimi, too, will shortly die and Terry will be left alone with the solitude she so wants to protect. Perhaps the deepest irony of the text and its most challenging aporia arises out of the desire to be connected, to be loved, to be daughter and granddaughter and its conflict with the desire to be free to choose solitude, to find refuge in being alone. Terry Tempest Williams struggles to against letting mother and grandmothers go, but she succeeds. Even in her success, though, the visions of empty eggs and hollow wombs haunt her in the museums. And they haunt us. We wonder whether she has chosen well. Is her maternal legacy a distended belly, pregnant with tumor, or is the tumor a symbol of the fear that keeps her from connecting with her children as her maternal ancestors have touched and loved her?

Refuge sadly concludes that fear and security reside in solitary survival. It announces the futility of faith in a revived and resurrected future as it rejects the traditional Mormonism of Diane Tempest. And it announces its choice of lonely isolation in its denial of Diane Tempest's most cherished wish: the continuation of the line of courageous Tempest women through her only daughter.

**IS THERE REFUGE IN THE TEXT?**  
**NARRATOR AND READER**  
**IN TERRY TEMPEST WILLIAMS'S MEMOIR**

Thomas G. Plummer\*

I titled my remarks "Is There Refuge in the Text?" in part because it alludes to Stanley Fish's now well-known title, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1980). He refers to the fact that any given text of literature may be susceptible to multiple readings in any group of students in the same class as they construct its various meanings from their own perspectives and understanding. The question, "Is there a text in the class?" which a student put to one of Fish's colleagues, is, of course, fundamental to reader-response theory. It is also germane to the approach I want to take today to Terry Tempest Williams's memoir, *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* (New York: Vintage, 1991). I am going to borrow a few ideas from reader-response theory and theories of moral, cognitive, and spiritual development to explore reactions to her book by a group of BYU students.

Secondly, my title, picking up on the title of the memoir, alludes to my hypothesis that Williams's memoir may also be an instrument for understanding its young Mormon readers. I might also have phrased my question, "Can these readers find a hiding place in this text?" I suggest that the answer is "No." I am particularly interested in matters of faith. In significant measure, this is a book about faith, and I wondered how this narrator affirms or challenges the students' perceptions of what it means to be a person of faith.

Reader-response theory is helpful here. It posits that the real reader faces the task either of becoming the implied reader, by assuming the role offered by the narrator, or of refusing to become the implied reader. To become the complete implied reader, one must accept, at least for the duration of the reading, the belief system offered by the narrator. What obstacles does the

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narrator of this text pose for college-age Mormons? Where do they accede? Where do they balk? What inhibitions do they have and why? In what ways does the narrator affirm or challenge their perceptions of what it means to be a Mormon, to be a Mormon woman, to be a scientist, to be a dying person, to be a daughter? Right from the outset, one could guess that *Refuge* poses certain problems for Mormon students. First, the narrator is unconventional by Mormon stereotypes of women as homemakers. Here is one who is a working scientist, married yet childless, and shamelessly independent in her marriage. She publicly declares herself part of a clan of one-breasted women, whose personal theology and religious practices occasionally defy the conventions of the pulpit.

Second, the reader, to whom the text is addressed, in reader-response terms, the implied or inscribed reader, is a mixture of non-Mormon and Mormon. The non-Mormon is addressed as a trusted friend, an environmentalist or environmental sympathizer, someone interested both in ornithology and oncology, a person with tolerance for, if not attraction to, spiritual matters, and one for whom the language and practices of Mormonism may be of curiosity or some interest. Still, Williams appears to have inscribed a Mormon reader in her text as well--a minor character, perhaps; but one might wonder, otherwise, why a person of another faith would be interested in the narrator's theory of the Holy Ghost as a woman. This is a matter for Mormons, probably one for the so-called "liberal" Mormons, whose theology has been influenced by feminist thinking and whose politics would place them somewhere outside the camp of Bo Gritz.

How do readers deal with these problems? How do they deal with them spiritually? What is to be learned about their own spiritual development when they encounter this highly intelligent, sensitive, singular woman, whose ideas about life, death, and God have been integrated with her experience in the Bear River Bird Refuge and the phenomenon of the rising Great Salt Lake?

The information on which I base my observations comes from a group of honors students enrolled in a course that Louise, my wife, and I taught during fall semester, 1993, "Memoir and the Imagination." They are among the brightest students at BYU, self-selecting, since this is not a required course. Several of the students perceived themselves as having a liberal bent. Four or five of them were on the editorial staff of the *Student Review*, an independent newspaper published by university students and distributed as an alternative voice to the *Daily Universe*, the official student newspaper.

With such a small sample, I do not intend this to be a scientific study. It has no statistical significance; the information is random. We got it by asking students to write a response to each chapter of *Refuge*. Before we discussed the text in class, we had them rush-write for five minutes on the question, "How are you connected or disconnected with this piece?" Still the forty or so pages from each student provided enough information to draw some general conclusions.

In creating a taxonomy of responses in terms of spiritual development, I have borrowed heavily from theories of moral development, particularly from Lawrence Kohlberg's *The Philosophy of Moral Development*, James Rest's *Development in Judging Moral Issues*, William G. Perry, Jr.'s theory of cognitive development ("Cognitive and Ethical Growth: The Making of Meaning"), and James Fowler's *Stages of Faith*, that was modified and simplified by M. Scott Peck in *Further Along the Road Less Traveled*. Above all, I am indebted to Clyde Parker and a group of educational psychologists at the University of Minnesota for introducing me to developmental theory fifteen years ago.<sup>1</sup> I do not intend to discuss the theories themselves. Time doesn't allow it and the casualness of my study doesn't warrant it.

After reading the students' responses and cataloguing them, and with the help of existing models, I have posited three phases of faith in the group:<sup>2</sup>

Phase 1: Authority-centered faith

Phase 2: Indiscriminate faith

Phase 3: Integrated faith

I'll offer some examples of each, as I have tried to classify them. Phase 1, authority-centered faith, is based entirely within the authority of the Church and takes its cues on what is right and what is wrong, what is true and what is false, from what is perceived to be official dogma. There is an underlying assumption among this group that doctrines of the Church are free of contradiction and ambiguity, that leaders are firmly united, and that there is a clear answer to every important question. This group has little tolerance for individual differences in religious belief or practice, and deviations cause anxiety. There is a great need in this group to project an image of unity to those not of the faith,

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<sup>1</sup>An unpublished study on spiritual development among Mormons was done in Minnesota under Clyde Parker's supervision. It used Perry's theory of cognitive development as its point of departure. Although I read the manuscript more than ten years ago, I could not review a copy of the study before completing this paper. My project differs in that it is not nearly as comprehensive as the Minnesota study, nor does it attempt to assess subjects at earlier or later phases of development.

<sup>2</sup>A word of explanation is in order here. While the three phases occur in chronological order, just as phases of the moon follow in sequence, I do not think of phase two as necessarily higher or better than phase one. It simply follows phase one. Phase three is another matter. It is a higher stage. While people in phases one and two are locked into particular ways of thinking--one rigid, the other open-ended, people in phase three have developed a personal, thoughtful faith. For the sake of consistency, I'll use the term "phase" rather than "stage" for all three groups.

a fear of what others may think if that image is in some way shattered. Faith is exercised largely as a matter of obedience.

Students belonging to this group responded to Williams's book in similar ways. Tammy<sup>3</sup> writes:

When she starts telling her feelings contrary to Church doctrine I feel very offended and alienated from her. . . . It seemed almost as if nature was her God. She even said she prays to birds.

David shares Tammy's concerns about the book being on the fringe:

She seems to pass herself off as one within the mainstream Mormon culture, living the Church, belonging to it. At the same time, I see her views and actions placing her more on the fringes of the Church. If she's writing for a national audience, her words will come off as "Mormon" and I think it will give a tainted view.

There is, in the thinking of this group, a narrow definition of what it means to be Mormon, what can be tolerated as Mormon, and who may claim to be Mormon in addressing a larger audience. The fear of what others will think holds considerable weight with these students. Image is important to them. They have a large investment in keeping the outward manifestations of the Church free from blemish. Discussion of alternative points of view and expression of differences are perceived as causing trouble, as "rocking the boat," in the words of one student.

Moving from this phase to Phase 2, indiscriminate faith, is prompted by some crisis. It may be when the absolute authority of the Church is perceived to be flawed in some way, when authorities clearly disagree, when personal experience collides with dogmas heretofore considered absolute, or when hard questions can no longer be resolved by easy answers. Such instances trigger a crisis of faith. There are signs among several of the responses that such a crisis is at hand. They are marked by a growing awareness of contradictions and ambiguities that are not easily reconcilable. Kelly writes:

Through most of this book, I hated it. I thought the cumbersome descriptions of birds and the lake were too much--I was not interested.

I thought her occupation was worthless and I disagreed with her interpretation of the Gospel at times. I, at times, found her selfish and weird.

At the end though, I realized something. She became admirable to me. She is an excellent writer and I appreciated that. She was a strong person. She had faced terrible tragedy and surfaced whole.

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<sup>3</sup>All student names are pseudonyms.



Kelly's initial outrage at the book--its environmentalism, its religious idiosyncracies, its narrator--has to come to terms, in the end, with a surprise: admiration for the writer, the person, and her perseverance. How is she to reconcile her reactions? What is she to do with the internal conflict?

That kind of crisis is even more apparent in Anne's response: "As a Mormon I am offended very often by what she has to say. So many unorthodox doctrines. Is it faith promoting? Yes." Anne is facing the paradox of how a book filled with what she calls "unorthodox doctrines" can simultaneously be "faith promoting." She struggles to reconcile the two. She continues,

The power of familial ties is so strong. I loved hearing of Salt Lake. Nature in control. She must adjust too. We all must adjust to change in our lives. I feel connected to that part. The changes and emotions which overcome us. How our nesting grounds like the birds may be destroyed. Survival is the trick. Connections with nature.

I am amazed by her intimacy with the land.

Still, the fear of this new and uncharted faith disturbs Anne. What happens when she has to leave Eden, to begin building a faith for herself? At this point, confronting her own faith takes the form of projecting her fears on the narrator. She continues: "I hold back, afraid she gets too close to the land. It has become her God. I don't know what to say."

This confusion, "I don't know what to say," signals a crisis. The old authoritative answers no longer hold sway. Something more is needed. But what? She is speechless. Now that unconventional ways of seeing, "unorthodox doctrines," can also produce a faith-promoting experience, what is one to do? The confusion is all the greater, because the narrator's highly individualized spirituality comes from within the ranks of the Church.

The crisis at this phase of authority-centered faith may prompt a broad range of reactions, which I call indiscriminate faith, because it fosters the general attitude, "one faith will bring you as close to God as another." Sometimes I think of it as a "hippie" faith. It reminds me of the slogan of the 1960s, "Do your own thing." It is a reaction against the ambiguities and contradictions of institutional practices and institutional faith. In so reacting, it accepts anyone's view as valid--or possibly the reverse, no one's views as valid. If the crisis at the phase of authority-centered faith has been strong enough, one may reject the whole institutional tradition outright. The baby goes out with the bath water. Since the Church, the thinking goes, is filled with contradictions, get rid of the whole thing. One belief is as good as another. Nothing is viewed critically or subjected to analysis. All convictions are equal. This phase may be as anti-authoritarian as the first is bound to authority. It, too, is therefore bound by authority, since its entire position is established as one against authority.

This group of students is at first somewhat more difficult to identify, because, contrary to the first group, which takes issue with points of doctrine in a rigid, measured way, this one is noncritical. Their reaction is more in the vein, "I'm with you all the way, no questions asked." Claudia writes: "I am connected completely. I am connected despite the fact that not one of my relatives has struggled with cancer. I am connected despite the fact that I have no clue about birds. I am connected emotionally."

Students in this phase are just as trapped as those in the first. Both are bound by a mind-set based on feelings, on instincts: the first, because they allow external authority to override their thinking, even their own experience,, the second, because their concern with hearing every voice noncritically tries to maintain a universal harmony at the expense of reality. The first seeks harmony by excluding radical voices, the second by including everything uncritically. Both are easily persuaded to deny what they know from personal observation. In the first phase, perceptions of what authority wants causes subjects to deny what they know. In the second phase, a desire to embrace everything causes them to deny what they know.

The crisis at the indiscriminate phase comes when one begins to realize that some approaches to faith may be more sensible than others, that indiscriminate faith may in fact have a cynical attitude underlying it: there is no truth anywhere. The crisis may be triggered by a feeling of spiritual illness: with the acceptance of anything, God, who is truth, has been lost, and God must now be found. The crisis, I suspect, could be triggered by depression, by a trauma such as a serious illness, by some near-death experience or prolonged anguish that causes one to realize that God cannot--must not--be lost. For whatever reasons, those in the indiscriminate phase may ultimately recognize a more defined need for God.

The way is not back to authority-centered faith, because that means denying personal experience. More likely, it consists of integrating in some way personal experiences in faith with the doctrines of the institution, of finding a balance between the two.

The crisis propels one on to the next phase, which I will call integrative faith. It combines a personal search for God with doctrines and other beliefs consolidated from a multitude of other sources, whether from science, philosophy, psychology, mathematics, or the arts. There is a tolerance among people at this phase for alternative ideas, but they do not accept them uncritically. M. Scott Peck, who calls this phase "mystical/communal" (125), compares it with the first phase by two contrasting statements, both of which are true in their own way but which reflect attitudes at different phases: At the phase "authority-centered faith" someone might say, "When you start fearing that big cop in the sky, you really wise up." At the integrative phase, one might say, "The awe of God shows you the way to enlightenment" (124-25).

Some students are wrestling their way beyond the first two phases to the third, integrative phase. They are working to reconcile and balance the personal with the institutional. Corina writes,

I felt very connected. In ways, I am Terry. I love the wilds. Wildlife is my major. I also love to write. I also have dealt with pain of death. My father died of heart problems, 10 years after his first heart attack. And then the horrible aftermath of being forced to grow up and take care of my mother. I am also at a phase right now where I wonder why the Church does not encourage individual thinking. But I am not near as radical as Terry is.

Up to this point Corina shows an inclination toward taking an integrative stand. Then suddenly she returns to an institutional phase. Is it out of anxiety? She continues: "In fact, I was shocked by some of what she said. I worry what non-members will think."

Kendall, on the other hand, is working more confidently toward his own balance between nature and institution:

I feel connected to much of the book. I've experienced nature and the Church in a similar way that Terry Tempest Williams has. I have often turned toward nature to find comfort and peace. I often go there to clear my thoughts, get in touch with myself, and get closer to God. But I become disconnected from Terry at a certain point. For her, nature becomes more powerful and compelling than Church leaders or society. For me, nature can never replace these things. Nature is where I can get myself in order, so that I can go back and be a part of society and understand what Church authority and doctrine means for me in my life. For me, nature can't stand alone--I need the authority of the Church.

The development of faith and the search for balance between self, institution, and society, it seems to me, is a project for a lifetime. Yet some, even at a young age, begin to sense this need for integration. While appreciating the merits of Williams's experience, they test it not uncritically against their own. Maria writes,

I went on a peace project last year. I didn't know what it involved. A lot of intensity of emotion is poured into such causes. Do you let emotion take over? Where does your spirituality fit in? Your patriotism? You can't just abandon your other ideals for one cause.

In some few cases, assessments challenged Williams's moral judgment on her own turf and her own terms with reasoning that transcends institutional and personal judgment to raise questions of a higher moral level. Lorraine writes,

At times I felt resentful of the power she had claimed in writing her mother's life--or in rewriting her life (I'm making this statement even though I liked the

book overall very much--I liked the writing). But the example I am thinking of is the death scene itself, which offended me deeply. Williams makes herself the main player in this scene. As I recall she lies with . . . her mother, coaching her death. I hated this. I thought it completely arrogant. Her mother was the one dying--she should get full credit. I felt like Williams took the credit herself--gave herself top billing.

Here the discussion rises to questions of what principles should govern the relationship between two individuals. It reaches the highest level of moral judgment in Rest's schema (37). This student is ahead of the pack.

The matter of faith, it seems to me, is one of coming to a greater sense of reality, not a lesser one. It involves embracing the truth of doctrine while integrating the truths that we personally perceive and cannot or should not deny. In the first two phases of faith, students deny what they know. Black is white, white is black in the interest of preserving or denying doctrine. And the institution, in the interest of preserving itself, sometimes engages in distorting truth. Things must look good.

I played piano in primary at Church for four years. During that time I became painfully aware of how many songs teach children to deny the truth, maybe because the truth is too painful or scary. After a particularly anguishing two hours of primary singing just before the 24th of July, I went to the men's room for relief. As I stood at the urinal, my home teacher, Howard van Fleet, a man of considerable faith and cynicism, joined me. "Howard," I said, "do you think pioneer children sang as they walked and walked and walked and walked?"

He looked bewildered for a few moments. "Maybe," he said. "Maybe sometimes to forget that their feet were killing them."

The three-phase model I have suggested is flawed, because I am certain it describes neither of the extreme ends of the faith axis. Just two years ago I read *Refuge* for the first time. I was recovering from surgery for a brain tumor and undergoing radiation treatments. I asked Francine Bennion, a friend who has suffered from diabetes all her life and celebrates each birthday as a new victory, "Francine, what is the up side of this experience?"

She answered without hesitation. "Now you can begin to live in reality." That reality for me is not one of diminished faith. It is one of greater faith. It is one that pours new and personal insight into old vessels and becomes a more complete brew.

I believe one of my tasks as a teacher is to help students face the truth they want to deny, to embrace it, not to denigrate it with recitations of empty slogans. There was a seminal moment for me last term in the memoir class. Anne, that same Anne who was struggling to reconcile the faith-promoting experience of reading *Refuge* with her perceptions of doctrine, wrote a final memoir piece on the burning of a trailer house she was living in one summer with her family. The fire ravaged the trailer and destroyed everything the family owned. She closed her penultimate draft with words to

this effect: "It was all right. We had each other, and that was all that mattered." She had just spent fifteen pages talking about this loss and then finished it off with a recitation that sounded vaguely like, "Families can be together forever." In this context, it didn't seem genuine.

"That was lovely, Anne," I said. "But I have a problem with your ending. I hate to say this quite so bluntly, but I don't believe you. I don't believe that after the anguish of losing all of your family photographs and keepsakes, everything you owned, it was all right. Was it really all right that you just had each other?" I didn't realize the force of my own question. If I had I would have asked it with more caution. Anne's eyes filled with tears, and she exploded before all of her peers with a loud wail. Fortunately a box of Kleenex was on the table.

Just this week I re-read her final draft. It now ends this way:

Mom had been badgering me to take a trunk of mine into the trailer, but I had balked. Never before had I been grateful for not listening to her. Upon inspection that trunk contained a piece of my baby blanket, my first doll with blue eyes that no longer closed and dog chewed feet, and a mohair shawl. A piece of me still existed.

There was no insurance. Within a week, Dad located a place to rent closer to Denver. We gathered ourselves and the animals which had not been stolen and left. The farm was sold to Dr. Biber. I couldn't feel as if I were moving. There was no packing or unpacking, only the simple act of getting into a car and driving away. My life was left. People don't leave Las Animas county except in death. I cannot ever leave. The land has kept the cremated remains of more than half my life as ashes mixed in the soil.

My teaching has become in some measure a concern with honesty and faith. I worry often that so many gifted students, who see the issues in secular discussions so clearly, become so clouded when the conversation broaches matters of faith. I worry that they revert to empty recitations when we begin discussing the most serious matters of our lives. I realize too that they are passing through phases--that, in the words of Faust, "a good person in life's dark struggles is well aware of the right path." But I also hope to introduce them to more people like Terry Tempest Williams, more people who can demonstrate what it means to wrestle with hard things and come out whole, to interweave birds and lakes and life and death into a personal fabric of faith. I don't want my students to find refuge in the text. I want them to be flushed out into the open.

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**"P.S. THE SLIMY ONE ON THE RIGHT":**

**REMARKS ON BOMBASTIC CRITICISM**

*Harlow Soderborg Clark\**

**Rock Canyon in January  
In Memoriam Brian Schoenberger,  
Died January 18, 1994**

Fifty years, my parents.  
You came with Krista to celebrate,  
Honor them.  
Party morning you came back from a hike  
To tell us of a canyon.  
"Rock Canyon," I said. "I played there."  
In early afternoon we hiked there,  
You and Krista and I.  
At a bend in the trail where mountain walls curved  
Amphitheatrically above us you stopped  
And worshipped.  
October's scrub oak, and pines and the lines  
of the mountain,  
You felt this place holy.  
I showed you how the lines  
Bespoke ancient earthquake  
And we continued up the canyon,  
Over the dry creek bed  
Climbed into some caves.  
One went straight back.  
You led, then stopped.  
I almost bumped into you.  
Finally you said, "Good thing I stopped.  
There's a hole, a shaft, right in front of me.  
The ground just started sloping."  
For two years I trembled when I thought

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\*Harlow Soderborg Clark received his MHA degree from the University of Washington in 1988 and is a regular contributor at AML meetings. He is adjunct faculty teaching English at Utah Valley State College. While he attended the funeral of his brother-in-law, Brian Schoenberger, this paper was read for him at the Association for Mormon Letters annual meeting, January 23, 1994, Westminster College, Salt Lake City.

What might have happened if I'd been leading,  
Or if I'd pushed you, not knowing what lay ahead.

That Christmas you came back,  
We hiked back up Rock Canyon.  
At home you read us how Krista was  
Ocean air and canyon trees and autumn leaves to you,  
The sun that caused you to open like a rose  
Of words to give in love.

Another year and a half that rose grew  
And became a ring of trees,  
Children of a redwood long turned to loam.  
A ring where you and Krista vowed and bowed.  
You bowed to your parents, to your guests, to each other,  
Then vowed to each other in presence of God, Goddess,  
parents, guests.

Next morning you and I took the rented chairs back,  
And joked about two men driving around Oakland in a van  
With Just Married written all over it.

Just six months ago, all that.  
A virus, the doctor said, broke out of your lungs  
Into your spine  
And took you into a coma deeper than old mine shafts,  
And with less chance of rescue.

I woke up this morning  
(If I had indeed been sleeping)  
Turned on the radio to hear of earthquake  
South a few hundred miles of you.  
Knocked out power in Seattle,  
North several hundred miles of you.  
Did you feel it? I wonder.

Tomorrow Krista will feel at peace enough  
To let you go, remove the machines that keep  
your heart  
Beating.

Saturday we will take you into the redwood stand  
Near the faerie ring and give you to the wind  
Until wind and Son give you back whole again  
And all of us are wholly new.

I suppose I slept Sunday night after my father told us Brian  
had slipped into a deep coma, brain-dead, but I woke with little  
sense of having slept. As I turned on the radio I found there had  
been an earthquake of 6.4 or higher overnight. The irony of this  
overwhelmed me. Not simply that an earthquake in our family seemed



to be matched by an earthquake a few hundred miles south of Brian, but also that one of my outstanding memories of Brian was of standing out on the Wasatch fault with him and Krista, showing them in the mountains the signs of an ancient earthquake.

There is, in Latter-day Saint culture a wide feeling that events in the world around us have symbolic meaning within our lives. I want to explore this briefly in a number of works, and look at how this sense that we should liken all things unto ourselves (see 1 Ne. 19:23) is related to that foremost of literary sins, Mormon didacticism. This paper began as an exploration of Mormon didacticism and its close relative, the nature and aims of bombastic or harsh criticism. I have refocused it towards one of the consequences of such criticism. Much harsh criticism stems from disappointment that we do not have a body of excellent literature. It seems increasingly apparent to me that such claims make for a denial of what we do have, a denial of the roots and the offspring of our literature.

On February 25, 1981, the BYU student paper, *Daily Universe*, ran an ad for a hair salon called Studio Nine. It showed three women looking directly at the camera. The one on the left is wearing a visor which hides her forehead and eyebrows. Her cheeks look hollow, and her lips form something between a sneer and a frown. The one in the middle has her hair pulled back emphasizing a high forehead, except for one pale lock hanging down in front of her eye. She is not smiling. The one on the right has an abundance of curly blond hair and a long neck, she is wearing a v-neck blouse or dress. She is touching shoulders with the one on the left. They would be facing away from each other if they were not looking at us. The one in the middle is behind and above them.

In some ways it is a disturbing picture; and about a week later a letter appeared in the *Universe* asking,

is it absolutely necessary to [take an ad with the photograph of the three ultra vogue] women advertising a hair salon? Those three make my flesh crawl! . . . The style of makeup with the shaved-off eyebrows . . . produces an emphasis on the eyes alone, as intended. But have you looked into those eyes? That [pack(?) of three women have expressions truly worthy of "The big city—" Sodom or Gomorrah.

I'd be afraid to step into [that] salon for fear one of those creatures might slither out of its slimy [hole] and sting me.

Carma deJong Anderson  
Provo, Utah<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Daily Universe*, Tuesday, March 3, 1981, 10. Unfortunately the letter was published in the inner column and some of it got lost in the binding, and hence, was not accessible on the microfilm. The words in brackets are my own best guesses. The ellipses represent passages I couldn't quite make sense of.

About a week later a second letter appeared:

Editor:

My husband and I got quite a kick out of Carma deJong Anderson's recent letter to the editor about the "slimy" women in the Studio Nine hair salon ad whose expressions looked "truly worthy" of Sodom or Gomorrah.

I've always considered myself sort of your basic Mormon housewife replete with three preschoolers and job in our ward primary presidency, so it was pretty fun as one of the models in the ad to be taken for "ultra vogue," racy, wicked and all that stuff. (I hope none of my primary kids can read, however.)

Carma said she'd be afraid to go to Studio Nine for fear "one of those creatures might sting" her. If it weren't for my three preschoolers keeping me at home, I'd love to lurk around the studio. On the other hand, maybe I ought to take them with me—the two with teeth would probably love to take a bite.

Gail Anderson Newbold  
Provo, Utah

P.S. The slimy one on the right with curly hair.

This exchange of letters has fascinated me for nearly a baker's dozen years now. I originally reacted pretty much the way Carma deJong Anderson did; but as I think about that reaction, it seems to me rather harsh. It would be easy to blame such harshness on sheer human cussedness, our desire not only to excel but to point out that others aren't excelling, to glory in that fact and blame them for it. It would also be easy to suggest that harsh criticism is warranted because people fail to meet the high expectations that the calling as an artist carries. But where do the high expectations come from?

Perhaps they come from statements about the artist being the unacknowledged legislator of humankind. Or perhaps those statements only reflect the high expectations, as the following incident reflects high expectations, of the power of art. In the autumn of 1983 a group of BYU students got together to create a play from Béla Petsco's *Nothing Very Important and Other Stories*. I remember another student telling us, "You need to be very careful. Satan can use things like this to keep people from going on missions." I've heard versions of that statement many times. But lest you think it a narrow parochial point of view from a fire-breathing right-wing BYU student, let me remind you of this statement by Kenneth Burke, widely taught in literary theory classes. Burke uses the metaphor of a military campaign and compares the writer to the campaign strategist. He begins the essay with a discussion of proverbs, and this passage begins with his version of the proverb, "If life hands you a lemon, make lemonade":

Does the artist encounter disaster? He will "make capital" of it. If one is a victim of competition, for instance, if one is elbowed out, if one is willy-nilly more jockeyed against than jockeying, one can by the

solace and vengeance of art convert this very "liability" into an "asset." One tries to fight on his own terms, developing a strategy for imposing the proper "time, place, and conditions."

But one must also, to develop a full strategy, be realistic. One must *size things up* properly. One cannot accurately know how things *will be*, what is promising and what is menacing, until he accurately knows how things are. So the wise strategist will not be content with strategies of merely a self-gratifying sort. He will "keep his weather eye open." He will not too eagerly read into a scene an attitude that is irrelevant to it. He won't sit on the side of an active volcano and "see" it as a dormant plain. (945)

I can't help but ask a question. Does this mean that if through "the solace and vengeance of art" I publish a poem in *Dialogue* about being a dispossessed father I may save someone from falling into a metaphorical volcano? (See Clark, "To Joseph".) The title of the essay is "Literature as Equipment for Living." If my poem is bad, will it leave the reader unequipped, or ill-equipped, to live the good, i.e., the examined, life? If this is a poor essay, am I responsible for your failures to discern that it is and act accordingly? What is the difference, I keep wondering, between a secular ethic comparing literature to a guide book, and bad literature to a guide book telling us that active volcanoes are actually dormant plains, and a religious ethic stating that because of the influence of literature a person may decide a very important issue like a mission poorly?

I'm not trying to dismiss Kenneth Burke by saying this. I am suggesting that if we occasionally feel discomfort at things our conservative Mormon culture says about art, those statements have parallels in the work of some of the most influential liberal thinkers of our day. (See Clark, "Toward a Theory.")

Burke's use of proverbs and metaphor as organizing principles ties back to what I said earlier about the sense in LDS culture that the events in the world around us mirror our spiritual lives. Even ordinary farm work such as castrating calves can become a mirror of the eternal world, as in this scene from Levi Peterson's *The Backslider*:

"When I was a boy, Cousin Jimmy Jamison got his privates shot off deer hunting," Salsifer said. "Nobody knew where the shot came from. There wasn't anybody around to help him and he bled to death."

"That's just as good," Frank said. "Who'd want to live without his privates?"

"Do you think he'll have them in the Celestial Kingdom?" Jeff asked.

"Sure he will," Raymond said. "How are you going to be gods and goddesses and create worlds without end and have spirit children forever and ever if you don't have

your privates?"

"The righteous will have their equipment in the hereafter," Salsifer said. "But the sinful won't have any need for theirs. God will fix them just like you're fixing these here bull calves."

Frank had got a puny shrivelled feeling in his pants. Nobody had ever told him about God castrating the wicked. It would be just like him to do it. (94)

I had similar conversations during the five summers I spent on my grandfather's dry farm, and I love how this scene captures the way the gospel seems to creep into any Mormon conversation.

The closeness and openness of the heavens is a common theme in LDS fiction. Consider, for example, Margaret Blair Young's fine novel, *Salvador* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1992), in which a man tries to kill his wife through a priesthood blessing. The stake president in that novel is introduced as a villain but becomes a kind of a hero, using his priesthood as righteously as the husband is using his murderously.

Or consider Belà Petsco's still-unpublished story, "The Blackness of the Darkness," about a young man who murders people so he can sing "O My Father" at their funerals. Near the end a character quotes the doxology from the epistle of Jude: "To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen." It occurred to me one day that Belà's reason for writing the story may have been that he wanted to write a story that ends in unabashed praise of God. He confirmed to me that that was one of many things he wanted from the ending.

Or consider Robert Kirby's *Brigham's Bees* which observes all the rules of the hard-boiled police thriller and in which the detective learns the identity of the murderer through an act of faith. Or Donlu Thayer's *In the Mind's Eye* in which our amateur detectives, lacking in wisdom, ask of God.

I said that this spiritual vision of life is related to that foremost of Mormon literary sins, didacticism. I want to define didacticism fairly broadly as writing which seeks to validate or perpetuate or celebrate the beliefs of a culture or group. This is close to the definition Susan Wakefield used when she dismissed Jack Weyland's novels *Charly* and *Sam* as "Sermons in Novel Form." "Good writing," she quoted Susan Howe, "requires an . . . ability to look at prevailing cultural myths with skepticism and objectivity. As long as our writing takes place within the context of Mormon cultural myths, we are only writing to each other, using literature to validate our culture rather than to explore it."<sup>2</sup>xx

I keep wondering, if we're not supposed to write in the

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<sup>2</sup>Susan Wakefield, "Sermons in Novel Form," *Sunstone Review* 2.1 (January/February 1982): 24-25. For a response from Orson Scott Card, see "Sermons in Critical Form," *Sunstone Review* 2.4 (April 1982): 25-27.

context of our cultural myths, not supposed to see the world through our own mythology, whose myths are we supposed to take our light from? I don't know what Susan Howe originally meant by those words, but I asked her once how she came to write her play, *The Burdens of Earth*. She told me she was fascinated by that moment in Liberty Jail where Joseph Smith rebukes the guards and felt Mormons should have that as part of their dramatic heritage. While she was researching the play, she found that the famous rebuke occurred in Richmond Jail, not Liberty Jail, and she became enthralled by Joseph's struggles with the betrayal that landed him in Liberty Jail, and the sense of abandonment by God that led Joseph to cry out, "O God, where art thou, and where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place?" (D&C 121:1).

Now I submit that an impulse which wants to give us something as part of our cultural heritage is an open generous impulse that both explores our culture and validates it. I am grateful that Susan Howe has the talent and discipline (comes from the word *disciple*, as my father is wont to remind me) to give her exploration and validation the fine form it has. The novels and stories I've mentioned above also both explore and validate our culture. It is worth noting that, despite Levi Peterson's carefully cultivated reputation as a backslider, his novel is squarely within that old and revered Mormon literary genre, the conversion story—two conversions, even.

I find that additional works also simultaneously challenge and validate our culture. Consider first the work of John Bennion. I was once asked, concerning a class I wanted to teach in Mormon literature, "You wouldn't teach *Breeding Leah*, would you?" I hadn't read *Breeding Leah* at the time; but now that I have, if I wanted a story to illustrate how much a stake president loves the people in his care and suffers for them, I would certainly choose "The Interview" from that collection and perhaps Doug Thayer's "The Clinic," from *Under the Cottonwoods*.

Or consider an unpublished story by Julie Nichols, "Cat Woman." A woman is planning to attend the temple after work one day. As she goes through the day, we see how other people around her feel about the temple and how she feels. But that's only part of her day. She keeps seeing a face flash before her, a horrible, monstrous face. In the temple she realizes that this is the face of the woman she is going through for and that the woman hates her. As the session progresses, she has a vision of this woman's life two or three hundred years earlier, a poor crazy woman ministered to all her life by the women of her village. She understands by the end of the session that her body has been the means of bringing relief, joy, and peace to this woman. I hope I read this story in print soon. It is one our culture should take joy in having produced.<sup>3</sup>

Or consider Elouise Bell's "The Meeting," where women preside,

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<sup>3</sup>My thanks to a reader for a Mormon magazine for sharing it with me.

conduct, and have lessons like, "Eschatology and Ether in the Perspective of the Book of Revelation," while the men get "Twenty Tips on Keeping a Tidy Garage," and, "Being a More Masculine You" (12) Bell's fiction deserves more than the passing notice I can give here. "The Meeting" is an apt title, as all of her fiction I've read deals with formal or informal meetings, particularly "Walk and Not Be Weary," which is a story about people going to a meeting to hear someone tell a story about why he decided to go on a mission. This story appeared in the *New Era* as a didactic story. It deserves some extended comment if only for how well it captures the way we do a lot more storytelling than preaching in our meetings.

My mother insisted that I read Lynn Matthews Anderson's hilarious story, "Buttons." The narrator tells us of a troublemaker in her ward, a woman determined to make every calling a feminist statement. She keeps getting demoted, until she finally becomes the sacrament bread coordinator. Although the story as a whole is quite ironic, the passage that describes her in that calling is quite moving and conveys great respect both for the sacrament and for what we do when we sustain people in a calling. She assigns the men in her ward to bake the bread for the sacrament; and if she finds they've bought a loaf or got their wives to fulfill their assignment, she chastises them for not sustaining her in her calling and again assigns them to bake the bread.

More ironic than the story was the irony of circumstances. In the aftermath of the September 1993 disciplinary councils, my father wrote this poem:

#### On Xing

~~crossed out—an inexact word in typescript~~  
~~but not erased~~  
~~left unused—an unread book~~  
~~but not unneeded~~  
~~cut off from communion—the words can't touch~~  
~~but not from the Word~~  
~~thrust forth—a babe with no cradle~~  
~~but not reborn~~  
~~no longer a member—expendable column or beam~~  
~~but not without friends~~

exhibit A and B and C ad omega

excise exile expel exceed excess exclude

O we could X all night X left and right  
 and never exhaust the extremes the explanations  
 the x's (no exponent to express this sequence)  
 the consequences:

exodus expiration excoriation exposé

explosion exasperation extirpation exotic

extra-vagance extrication eccentricity exertion  
exception exploration expectation expansion

expression excellence excitement expiation  
exuberance exhilaration exaltation ecstasy

I love the movement in the poem from pain to expiation and ecstasy. That movement is not what I expected when I started reading, but it is an important theme in Mormon writing. Eugene England, for example, explores it in "Enduring," and "Easter Weekend," Amy Gordon moves from pain to peace in Eileen Gibbons Kump's "Sayso or Sense," and the route from pain to expiation to ecstasy is certainly the road Frank Windham travels in *The Backslider*.

Perhaps we don't have a great literature, though I am more inclined to believe we don't have a great critic, a Vernon Louis Parrington to trace the Main Currents in Mormon Thought, or a Perry Miller to write book-length studies of what Cracroft and Lambert have given us in *A Believing People*. Perhaps when we think about our conservative culture we are apt to think of it as the slimy one on the right. I wish we didn't. I want the artist, thinker, storyteller, critic to be part of a community, not an unacknowledged lawgiver, not an excommunicant or other outcast, but a member, acknowledged and in full communion. Here is the beginning of a story:

### Chameleon

In the beginning, all the children of the Father and Mother sang for joy. "Hosannah, Hosannah, Hosannah," they shouted, "Hosannah to the Lion and the Ewe." The firstborn among these children was called the Lamb, named for his mother because he had her grace and compassion, her wisdom, her gift of story, to spin from his wool words of comfort, healing, shelter. The Father could not spin yarns, but he gave the Lamb the clue of truth to spin with his words, and a voice that could sing with the roaring of mighty wind or the flutter of dovetails.

All the children were given gifts, gifts differing, but gifts no less. Some sang notes that vibrated the hairs of the Lion very quickly, others notes that sank deep into the wool of the Ewe. Still others sang a range between the high vibrant notes of the Lion and the baa-ing of the Ewe. Some sang dissonant notes to add color and wholeness to the song.

Chameleon was given a gift. He could sing in the voice of every creature, strengthen, deepen or heighten the song of any.

The children were sent on a journey. They were to sing their way back home and listen for answering song, listen carefully as the song might be faint.

But soon it happened that each singer began to glory in his or her own range and notes, began to judge the other singers as less,

began asking Chameleon to join with them and forsake all others.  
Chameleon became a wanderer.

I don't know how this story will end. It's taken maybe a dozen years to go from title and image to beginning of story, but I want Chameleon to be able to sing many songs openly, songs of joy and sorrow, of anger and passion, forgiveness and need, separation and union, to sing all this as a member in community, a colleague and companion.

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## CRITICIZING MORMON CULTURE

### OR WHATEVER HAPPENED TO GOOD WILL?

Neal W. Kramer\*

*Nobody's right if everybody's wrong.*

--Stephen Stills

*And blessed are ye if ye have no disputations among you. --3 Nephi 18:34*

My mother thinks I'm a pretty good person. In fact, most of the time she thinks I'm downright special. But there is one side of me that she finds terribly puzzling. Every two or three months I get strange mail. No, it does not come in plain brown paper and there are no glossy photographs. I generally open it quickly, chuckle two or three times, and then leave it open where she will be sure to see it. "Oh," she'll exclaim, "how can you stand to have that 'critical Sunstone stuff' around the house?" "Sunstone" is her metaphor for anything that is even slightly irreverent or critical toward the most important part of her life: the Church and the good people she associates with from day to day and week to week. Mom senses that such slight irreverence is a problem, even for her son, who, like Mary Poppins, is practically perfect in every way.

And my mother, as usual, is right. The slight irreverence and the ironic laugh are part of the persona of the intellectual, the critic. And criticism is a problem. It has become a problem of ever larger proportions in our little community nestled here in the high mountain valleys of the west. It is a problem, in part, because intellectuals know odd things. They know that *Gulliver's Travels* is most decidedly not a kid's book. They get the dirty jokes in Shakespeare. And it is a problem because the intellectuals are critical. We are critical. We take things apart and explain why we think they don't work better and how they ought to be changed. My mother thinks my being critical of Mormon things is dangerous to me and to my life in the Church. She fears that I will lose my faith.

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She knows that if I lose my faith, she will lose me. And so she thinks I, like Prometheus, am still playing with fire though I appear in other ways to be a mature and responsible adult.

Merely playing with fire is dangerous to the edifice of faith. But are those who practice the art of criticism simply playing? Is the critical stance, with its often eccentric knowledge and easy willingness to dissect ideas and institutions, of value among the Mormons? My first answer is an uneasy "no and yes," for the past few years has seen criticism, a once noble profession in Mormondom, plummet from the heights of Ensign Peak to the pollution of the valley floor. Ours has become the age of "Inversion Criticism," with the sulphur dioxide of venom passing for the pure mountain air of intelligent and edifying discourse. But I believe we can clean it up, with the help of some very good advice from Elder Dallin H. Oaks. In *The Lord's Way*, Elder Oaks both defines an appropriate "criticism" and offers an antidote to the unseemly controversy to which we have subjected ourselves in these days. I propose to apply the antidote to three specific instances which mark, for me, the failure of Mormon criticism: the battle between the professors of religion and the historians; the marquee matchup between the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies and Signature Books; and public challenges to General Authorities and Church policy.

Elder Oaks begins his discussion of criticism with some careful definitions:

*Criticism* has several meanings. One is "the act of passing judgment as to the merits of anything." This kind of criticism is inherent in the exercise of agency and freedom. In the political world, critical evaluation inevitably accompanies any knowledgeable exercise of the cherished freedoms of speech and of the press. In the private world, we have a right to expect critical evaluation of anything that is put into the marketplace or the public domain. Reviewers of books and music, sports writers, scholars, investment analysts, and those who test products and services must be free to exercise their critical faculties and to inform the public accordingly. This kind of criticism is usually directed toward issues, and it is usually constructive. It has an appropriate role to play in relations among the Saints and in respect to Church programs and leaders. (189-90)

That is the definition all sincere Mormon critics believe they adhere to. Unfortunately, especially in the cases I will consider here, Elder Oaks's second definition is the one that actually comes into play: "Another meaning of criticism . . . is 'the act of passing severe judgment; censure; faultfinding.' This kind of criticism is usually directed toward persons, and it is usually destructive. It is pervasive in our society" (190). To explain how such criticism is destructive, and what it destroys, is one of my purposes today. A particular source of this destruc-

tiveness is what Elder Oaks calls quarrelsomeness or faultfinding. It is an attitude toward the opposition. This patronizing and often condemnatory tone undermines or overshadows the claim that intellectual substance is the actual focus of an argument. Elder Oaks calls such contention "disagreement plus a wrathful spirit or a quarrelsome method" (138-39).

In addition to the anger and desire for a quarrel manifested in this criticism, there is also a tendency to move away from tentativeness and toward absolutist rhetoric. Elder Oaks's thinking on these matters is characterized by the following statement, which I describe as balanced or reasonable: "At the outset, I reject two extremes" (155). Many Mormons, because they believe so strongly that the Church is true, and in their desire to be true to it in return, take principles they believe strongly and try to make them even stronger by adding superlative adjectives, using hyperbole, or making unjustifiably absolute claims for their positions. They want us to know how seriously they take their claims. But the dogmatism they too often resort to can unwittingly serve to betray their belief. They appear to need to embellish faith, trying to make it better than it is, because they seem to believe their audiences will not really accept the humble and simple manifestations of genuine faith. Such hyperbole can also lead to exaggerated claims about the wickedness of opponents and their views. And then criticism degenerates to "wrathful" name calling. These weaknesses become readily apparent in the three cases I mentioned above.

## I

My first case examines Robert L. Millet's collection of essays *"To Be Learned Is Good, If . . ."* I will focus my remarks on Millet's Preface, which exhibits at least two of the deficiencies described above. *To Be Learned* is written with the stated intention of exposing members of the Church whose "hearts and desires [are] more in harmony with the worldview of Babylon" (ix). While such rhetoric is no longer surprising from a Mormon critic, it seems to me to have violated the high standard set by Elder Oaks. Characterizing "hearts and desires" is deeply personal. This statement is not part of a public discussion of ideas whose potential may be harmful to the Church. It is a personal attack on the worthiness of individual writers. Its tone is contentious and quarrelsome. It does not seek to achieve a level of moral persuasion.

In addition, Brother Millet chooses to characterize some writers as having "a compulsion to bring the Church up to date; a desire to supersede traditional values, to liberate the 'naive' believer; and an inordinate zeal to revise the message of the Restoration in a manner that would be more palatable and acceptable to a cynical secular world" (ix). The words "compulsion," "inordinate zeal," and "cynical secular world" imply lack of self-control and absence of character. The ironic twisting of "to liberate," "to revise," and "to supersede" serves primarily to denigrate and belittle Millet's unnamed opponent(s). This language is exaggerated, but with the purpose of emphasizing the utter

depravity of the so-called "learned."

As he concludes his preface, Millet loses control of his rhetoric altogether. He ends up making extreme claims that even he, I suspect, would not really believe. Here Millet asserts that the book has been written to show "that a member of the Church need not fall prey to the increasingly vocal voices of those who choose to preach from the forums of dissent; that one can have implicit trust in the Church and its leaders without *sacrificing or compromising anything*" (x; emphasis mine). The problem with this passage is the unreasonably extreme claim that being a member of the Church will require no sacrifice or compromise. A simple quotation from Elder Boyd K. Packer, whom Brother Millet surely reveres, will illustrate the extremism of the passage. Speaking of the difficulty of balancing one's Church service and spiritual life with university training and scholarship, Elder Packer once said: "It may be that you will lay your scholarly reputation and the acclaim of your colleagues in the world as a sacrifice upon the altar of service." Elder Packer's position is reasonable. It is calm. It recognizes dilemmas and the need to make personal choices that will be difficult and challenging. Elder Packer makes good sense. Brother Millet, on the other hand, has resorted to extremist rhetoric, which at least appears to contradict someone he's trying to support.

But we ought not to think that Brother Millet alone resorts to such extreme claims. Almost all Mormons are prone to degrading their critical stances by adopting unauthorizable dogmatism. Since we believe in absolutes, it is easy to believe that all discourse about truth ought to be couched in absolutist language. At this level, some Mormon historians, the very ones criticized in *To Be Learned*, have been overly careless in their work. Let me choose a particularly obvious example and then comment. The following passages are taken from an essay by D. Michael Quinn:

All internal evidences concerning the manuscript blessing of Joseph Smith III, dated 17 January 1844, give conclusive support to its authenticity.

Moreover, the fact that the document is in the handwriting of Thomas Bullock makes impossible any suggestion that the blessing is an invention of someone sympathetic with the later claims of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

Even though Joseph had ordained four other men before 1844 to succeed him and had given the Quorum of Twelve administrative authority over the church equal in authority to the First Presidency, it is obvious that he intended his son Joseph Smith III to one day become president of the LDS Church. (69-70; emphasis mine)

The quotations have an eeriness about them, don't they? Brother Quinn is describing as genuine, using absolute terms, a document we now know to be a forgery. The Joseph Smith III blessing is not authentic, even with its "conclusive internal evidence." It

was the "invention of someone" whose sympathies, while not necessarily RLDS, lay outside the Church. And it is not at all "obvious" that Joseph ever "intended" anyone to become his successor. How is it that our intellectual skills lead us to such overstated claims to absolute knowledge?

The point of my rhetorical question, of course, is that our intellectual training ought to be leading us in just the opposite direction. The skilled critic recognizes the need for tentativeness. While we admire bold new interpretations, we know that such boldness must be accompanied by rigor, careful documentation, experience with a variety of texts, and interpretations. If not, we will be overwhelmed by the consequences attendant upon our overweening pride. Elder Packer warns that "particularly are we in danger if we are out to make a name for ourselves" (268). For giving in to our proud desires for fame at the expense of careful scholarship leads quickly to abuse. Elder Packer's quotation from Doctrine and Covenants 121 in this regard is an appropriate antidote to our sinful desire for easy absolutes:

Because [our] hearts are set so much on this things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that [we] do not learn this one lesson--

That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness.

That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man.

Behold, ere he is aware, he is left unto himself, to kick against the pricks, to persecute the saints, and to fight against God (D&C 121:35-38). (275-76)

The warning from the Doctrine and Covenants is especially relevant to would-be Mormon critics, who are asked here to probe their motives with great caution. I am strongly suggesting that Mormon critics are on shaky ground when they do not plumb their own souls, instead of the souls of others, when writing about Mormon culture. If our primary motives become fame, greed, or power, we can lose more than simply the respect of our peers. Elder Packer warns those who "might sell [their expert knowledge about the Church] for money or profit in some way from its publication or inflate an ego by being first to publish it." He emphasizes that some critics desire "to destroy faith, if they can, and the Church, if they are able. [But] the Church will move forward, and their efforts will be of little moment" (269). That "little moment" is hardly worth the spiritual risk implied by the passage.

## II

At the risk of going on forever, I'd now like to try to characterize the imbroglio between Signature Books and the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies. Some of the F.A.R.M.S. folks appear to believe that one of the purposes for Signature's existence is the desire to proliferate, if not legitimize, anti-Mormon ideas: ideas presented to destroy the faith of Mormons and to make Mormonism less respectable among Signature's non-LDS readers. Signature workers have accused F.A.R.M.S. of being illiberal and anti-intellectual, not to mention impolite, in its reviews of certain Signature publications. And I suppose it all would have ended right there if someone had not sensed the chance for a good fight.

When we Mormon critics put our all into a literary battle, we often resort to something akin to character assassination. Most of us are too weak and sissified by sitting before typewriters and computer screens to handle it the old-fashioned way. There is no shooting or punching. No blood is even spilled. Instead, letters to the editor at the local papers spew forth a version of controlled, even educated, vitriol. We're experts at knowing just the right thing to say to offend, intimidate, and insult the opposition. And we all know that the right metaphor is never a literal insult. Why would anyone think to take it that way? Why, indeed.

And then there's the rumor mill. This gossip usually takes the form of stories about people losing their temple recommends or adopting outlandish lifestyles. Sometimes, I'm sorry to say, I have even heard sexual perversion get tossed around. Such gossip is despicable, even if it were true. As Elder Oaks says, "One who focuses on faults, though they be true, tears down a brother or a sister. The virtues of patience, brotherly kindness, mutual respect, loyalty, and good manners all rest to some degree on the principle that even though something is true, we are not necessarily justified in communicating it to any and all persons at any and all times" (193). But since gossip usually does not get published, many critics resort to the next best thing--name calling. We do it under the guise of respectable intellectual discourse, but we do it just the same. Its purpose is often intimidation, but it also has the purpose of placing ourselves spiritually above those we accuse. It is a brutal form of personal judgment decried by the Savior:

But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of his judgment. And whosoever shall say unto his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

Therefore, if ye shall desire to come unto me, and rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee--

Go thy way unto thy brother, and first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I will receive you.

Agree with thine adversary quickly while thou art in the way with him, lest at any time he shall get thee, and thou shalt be cast into prison (3 Ne. 12:22-25).

In light of that passage, Daniel C. Peterson's tendentiously long and mediocrally casuistic argument about name calling and threatened lawsuits in the 1992 edition of the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* seems to me to avoid the more important issue. Let me illustrate by referring to a single name that served as the catalyst, I believe, for all the later overblown rhetoric and hurt feelings. I'm speaking, of course, of Korihor. If you want to see the Mormon equivalent of shouting "fire!" in a crowded theater, walk into a Mormon "symposium," point at anyone, and shout "Korihor!"

My initial experience with "Korihorizing" happened my first day back at BYU after my mission. I had taken a great Book of Mormon class in my one semester on campus before leaving and was hoping for an even better class when I got back. My first teacher was a psychology professor so committed to the Book of Mormon that he taught a seven o'clock (that's a.m.) class before beginning his psychology classes and research. I'm sure he felt that it left him better prepared to be an excellent scholar. The class was marvelously stimulating. I learned doctrine and felt the Spirit. It was a highlight of my whole undergraduate experience. That course had been numbered 121, so I thought that the 422 course I registered for when I came back would be four times better. The first day in class began with a description of Korihor's teachings that quickly turned into a diatribe against philosophy and psychology as they were currently being taught at BYU. I was so disappointed that I dropped that class and moved back down to 122 with my old teacher. I might add that my philosophy course that semester also heightened my spiritual awareness of the intellectual life. Why did that one good brother feel compelled to attack other good brethren inside the Church and at the Church's university by comparing them, even unwittingly, with Korihor? I have no easy answer.

The recent fight between F.A.R.M.S. and Signature took on some of the same characteristics when Stephen E. Robinson, in a review of a Signature Book by Dan Vogel, implied that Vogel was a "Korihor." "Korihor's back," he said, "and this time he's got a printing press" (312). Brother Peterson defends Robinson's use of the image, and his own decision to publish it, by attempting a logical justification. The syllogism goes something like this: Korihor taught naturalistic principles. Vogel's work uses some of the same principles. Ergo, Vogel must be a Korihor (Peterson, xxi-xxiv). My freshmen could see the holes in that logic. Korihor's wickedness consists in much more than his attitudes toward epistemology. Brother Robinson conveniently forgets to mention Korihor's bad faith or his pact with Satan, though at least that must be implied when a Mormon refers to anyone else as Korihor. All Robinson supposedly meant was that Vogel used naturalistic justifications for some of his opinions. If that is the case, why pile on all of the other baggage associated with Korihor? Should

all anti-Mormons be struck dumb, made to beg for food, and finally be trodden down by vicious Zoramites? Such accusations certainly offer little of the hope for repentance and a change of heart that characterizes real Church discipline or Elder Oaks's attitude toward critics: "I conclude with a message of hope. When Isaiah condemned the critics of his day, he concluded with a prophecy. He said that in time the children of God would 'fear the God of Israel' and 'sanctify [his] name.' Continuing, he declared, 'They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine.' (Isa. 29:23-24.) In that spirit I pray for the day when all of us will know God and keep his commandments" (207). Calling exclusionary and derogatory names does little to invite repentance or to improve the intellectual climate along the Wasatch Front.

Too often, when the name calling starts, it is excused with a claim of righteous indignation--casting the moneychangers out of the temple. A cruel implication follows from such an accusation. The accuser claims to be a good, or at least orthodox, Mormon, a protector of the faith from those who would destroy it from within. But the accused is forced to prove a negative: "How long have you been a ravening wolf in sheep's clothing?" How can a person so accused demonstrate good faith or good will in the face of such bad-willed questioning? Of course, the person wouldn't be so defensive if he or she were not so guilty, right? I imagine the Puritans of Salem were asking the same questions of the "witches" they tried by physical ordeal in 1692.

Name calling also implies specific authority for making the charge. Some claim their authority is spiritual--they were inspired to make the charges and to protect the Church. I am on somewhat shaky ground here, but I believe that most such charges are generated at least as much by political temperament or intellectual differences as by inspiration. My reason for rejecting that implied claim of inspiration has to do with my understanding of how such inspiration works in the Church. Stewardship over inspiration for the benefit of the spiritual lives of Church members rests with properly constituted priesthood authority. An attack on personal worthiness in a public forum constitutes, for me, a violation of the discipline and order of these matters in the Church. Questions of personal worthiness are to be carefully dealt with, but only by those who are regularly ordained for that purpose and only in private, except under very extraordinary circumstances.

Some who make these public attacks appear to believe that if they try to mimic the intellectual content and the rhetorical style of arguments by General Authorities, they somehow have the right to assume general priesthood authority themselves. Their claims, it seems to me, though, are always only intellectual or doctrinal. They cannot carry general priesthood authority and so are inappropriate, even if the person who makes the claim holds a significant local position in the Church. Even employment by the Church or a position on a general Church committee does not grant such authority. The rationale for my position follows, I believe, from the principle enunciated in Doctrine and Covenants 121:39: "We have



learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion." The key phrase here is "as they suppose." The Mormon critic who makes a personal attack, a challenge on the grounds of personal worthiness, even when well-meaning and sincere in his or her desire to protect the Church, in my mind, supposes too much authority. Once too much authority has been supposed, exercising dominion over anyone else is by definition unrighteous.

### III

A third category, strikingly different from the first two, is the instance when a critic chooses, under the guise of public debate, to challenge a statement or policy articulated by a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles or First Presidency. This instance is the most challenging, since it probably generated the venom involved in the previous two examples and appears to justify claims of apostasy and anti-Mormon attitudes among Church members. Two examples of such challenges should suffice to allow some discussion of the clear principles in this matter as articulated by Elder Oaks. The first involves a direct challenge to Elder Packer by D. Michael Quinn and the second involves David Knowlton's very vocal criticism of Church policy in Latin America.

On 22 August 1981 Elder Packer presented his essay "The Mantle Is Far Far Greater Than the Intellect" to the annual Church Educational System Religious Educators Symposium. For many historians, I'm sure, the talk came as a shock. Elder Packer strongly implied that the writing of Mormon history was out of control and that some versions of Church history were becoming secular rather than sacred explanations of the rise and success of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He suggested specific ways in which the sacredness of the Mormon story could be protected by Church educators and stated that loyal teachers and writers should try to follow his advice. In November of the same year D. Michael Quinn presented an essay in response. In it he challenged a number of Elder Packer's conclusions as well as some reached earlier by Ezra Taft Benson, then President of the Council of the Twelve.

I believe that a number of Quinn's responses are intellectually untenable, but I do not believe that to be the central issue here. (See Kramer, "Looking for God.") The question is not even Brother Quinn's disagreement with Elder Packer. Rather, the problem is how he chose to respond. In this case, a public forum was inappropriate. There was too much potential for damage to Elder Packer or to Brother Quinn for such a disagreement to be aired in public. In his defense, I'm sure Quinn had no idea his essay would raise such a ruckus. But that still does not justify his carelessness in having gone public with his criticism.

In a similar case, anthropologist David Knowlton, a specialist in issues dealing with the culture and politics of Bolivia and other South American countries, began publishing work addressing

issues and problems associated with the rise of Mormonism in the area. As the Church became a target for anti-U.S. activities in Chile and Bolivia, Knowlton began to challenge the effectiveness of certain Church policies. He also implied that the Church was deliberately acting as a kind of imperialist agent, exporting U.S. values and culture as much as the restored gospel of Christ. His work seemed to justify the choice of terrorist groups to bomb LDS facilities and even kill missionaries in an attempt to destroy U.S. influence in their countries. Brother Knowlton, again for reasons I'm not sure of, chose to make public this sort of criticism. As in the case of Brother Quinn, I believe the decision was unjustified and potentially damaging to the Church and to Brother Knowlton.

Sometimes, given our training, we critics believe that an open forum is the best place for airing grievances. If I have a disagreement with scholars who write about Milton, my best response may very well be to go to a symposium and present a paper in which I explain why I disagree, even if the interpretation they espouse has been accepted for a hundred years. Skillful scholars have been using this method in all academic areas for years, and it has resulted in the discovery of many truths as well as the presentation of important and thought-provoking insights. In these days of pressure on all teachers to publish or perish, there is an even greater urgency to become involved in critical controversy of one sort or another.

And so we may be tempted to ask, if this public debate is so successful in encouraging us to think and grow in relation to our disciplines, then why not use the same methods in our dealings with Church leaders? After all, they give plenty of public speeches and even sound sometimes like the controversialists we meet in our professions. I'm going to let Elder Oaks answer:

"Persistent, public critics punish themselves. By deliberately separating themselves from those the Lord has called as leaders of his Church (local or general), critics forfeit the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord. They drift from prayer, from the scriptures, from Church activity, and from keeping the commandments. They inevitably lose spirituality and blessings" (205).

The spirit of public personal attack or challenge is the spirit of contention. It invites return fire and drags unwitting opponents down with it. It also sullies our day-to-day relationships. Public attack seems to demand that we take sides, that we prolong and even accentuate contention. But Elder Oaks again provides some key advice in this regard: "Personal differences about Church doctrine, policy, or procedure need to be worked out privately and without contention. There is nothing inappropriate about private communications concerning such differences, provided they are carried on in a spirit of love" (201). Even criticism of the sort written by Brothers Knowlton and Quinn could have been handled privately. Long essays may be presented to the General Authorities in private, in the spirit of love and concern, especially when one suspects that personal knowledge may provide help with vexing problems. In fact, we clearly need to be asking ourselves why more of what passes as legitimate public criticism

among the Mormons isn't presented in private.

#### IV

At the beginning of this essay I asked whether or how criticism might play an edifying role in Mormon society. I do not feel much better about it now than when I began. But I hope that critical intelligence does have something positive to contribute to our culture. My most idealistic self still remembers the best days at BYU, at the feet of strongly opinionated and critically refined professors, whose testimonies were unassailable. These good people helped build strong testimonies in me and many others, enabling us to give our best to the cause of Zion. My more cynical self remembers those friends who have left the Church. They often claim that their intelligence won't allow them to believe the "cunningly devised fables" of the restoration. Perhaps well-meaning critics were the faith-destroying angels.

While it appears that most of my critique deals with decorum, that may simply be the result of the flood of intellectually insubstantial criticism that has inundated us. And while that is not good for Mormon letters, it may not be all bad either. We need to be reminded that good manners count, even in criticism, for decorum and civility must play a central role in any future Mormon criticism. Absence of habits of decorum inevitably invites incivilities of all sorts--and in that atmosphere incivility masquerades as real criticism. Where will civility come from? Elder Oaks rightly maintains that "Christians who have concern for others exercise care in how they use the truth. Such care does not degrade the truth; it ennobles the truth" (193). We must care enough about our ideas and our opponents that we do not confuse personal attacks with criticism of ideas. We must think harder and better, not merely find cleverer ways of deriding those with whom we disagree. Perhaps we might even consider the ideal of writing more and publishing less.

Alma gave his son Shiblon some very wise advice that applies equally well to us:

And now, as ye have begun to teach the word even so I would that ye should continue to teach; and I would that ye would be diligent and temperate in all things.

See that ye are not lifted up unto pride; yea, see that ye do not boast in your own wisdom, nor of your much strength.

Use boldness, but not overbearance; and also see that ye bridle all your passion, that ye may be filled with love (Alma 38:10-12).

So ought we to conduct ourselves if we expect criticism to reclaim its noble place at the table of Mormon letters.

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FAITHFUL AND AMBIGUOUS FICTION:  
CAN WEYLAND AND WHIPPLE DANCE TOGETHER  
IN THE HOUSE OF FICTION?

John Bennion\*

The Two Windows

Long before the AML lectures by Bruce Jorgensen and Richard Cracroft, critics divided Mormon literature into two camps. Before Cracroft's mantic versus sophic, before Jorgensen's criticism which welcomes the stranger versus that which welcomes only friends, before these recent binary oppositions, critics used terms such as Karl Keller's orthodox fiction versus jack-fiction, Edward Geary's literature created from dogma versus that created from experience, Eugene England's modern home literature versus that which marks the "dawning of a brighter day." Although each critic cuts the cake differently, these oppositions have persisted for decades. Few of the terms are nonjudgmental; each camp sees the other's literature as an inferior form. Nearly half a century ago, Don D. Walker wrote:

Writers need a tradition, a system of moral values in which they can make meaningful judgments--they need a frame of belief. Writers within the Church accept the frame and are not troubled by any searching for convictions: they bring firmness, optimism, but also oversimplification, naivete, sometimes hypocrisy. Writers outside the Church see the form, the predominant tradition, as merely historical and find it useless for their own terms of response. (Qtd. in Mulder 88)

Since this statement was written remarkably few writers have bridged the gap and written inside/outside literature, which all Mormon critics could embrace. (Doug Thayer and Margaret Young may be exceptions in fiction.) Publishing literature which possesses

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both sweetness and light (entertainment and knowledge from respectively, popular and literary forms) is the stated goal of Orson Scott Card's Hatrack River Press, but whether he has succeeded is another question. Despite what he implies, the author of the first sampling is no Twain or Austen. After all this time, we still have readers and writers bemoaning either the weakening influence of popular and sentimental forms or the damning influence of humanism and other isms on our Mormon literature. Literary writers continue to sell their high quality thousands of volumes and popular writers their crowd-pleasing hundreds of thousands. Critics and readers at the front and back windows of the house of fiction continue to praise their view of the drama of experience. (Whose voices are those clamoring that they are positioned at the front?) Perhaps it's time to wonder why the two attitudes persist as separate.

I argue that each kind of literature has its own virtue. "Which won't necessarily effect a temple marriage or a one-night stand?" Bruce Jorgensen wrote in the margin of an early draft. Neither, I think. I'm encouraging only a grudging friendship, an occasional dance where readers of faithful and literary fiction take turns leading (and not with a strong right); I'm after the recognition that authors of the two kinds of fiction are about different enterprises. As a recent article in the Association of Writing Programs journal says of a similar debate, "In fact, literary and popular fiction cannot compete. Competition implies similarity. Male walruses compete for mates, but only with other male walruses. At county fairs, pies aren't judged against poultry. All readers sense that literary fiction and popular fiction are radically different enterprises" (Penner 15). With Mormon novels and short stories, on which I choose to focus, readers sense the familiar in the fictions of the opposite camp--perhaps similarity of structure, recognizable experience, and common language--but they also smell something slightly off, like week-old meat. The main difference is one of rhetorical purpose. One stresses solidarity of cultural values at the expense of literary quality, the other stresses literary ambiguity and complexity at the expense of reverence for tradition. One designs to shore up community, one shows how experience deconstructs communal values.

### The Rhetorical Purpose of Faithful Fiction

In this comparison I choose Jack Weyland, not the best or worst of his order, to stand for popular or faithful fiction. ("Well," says Cracroft over lunch after hearing this paper delivered, "you've certainly stacked the deck on this one." Weyland's aim is to write books which will act as maps to young people as they chart their way through serious social challenges: selection of marriage partners, death of loved ones, drug addiction, sexual abuse. There are excursions into the moral wilderness (in the margin Jorgensen writes, "on paved tracks, with guardrails picnic tables, and pit toilets"), but readers can be confident that the narrator and one or more of the characters have a reliable map.

which clearly marks good and evil and which will lead everyone back to safe ground.

One example is Weyland's *Stephanie*, which portrays a young woman with a serious drug problem. Weyland takes her from addiction to recognition of her illness to recovery at a drug and alcohol abuse center to membership in an AA group, but he's still not finished. A literary writer might end the novel there, but she's not home yet. She's still a member of a group which smokes and swears, obvious strangers and foreigners to Weyland's Mormon audience. The narrator must lead her out of that group and fully back into the Church, where she has the promise of marrying a returned missionary in the temple. My training makes me want to mock this kind of extended plot, but Weyland's books sell like peanuts at a circus. It strikes me as simple-minded elitism to say that all these readers are ignorant, that they can't tell the difference between cotton candy and apples. Despite my affinity for humanistic fiction, I find something satisfying about the possibility that pure and heroic people could prevail.

This journey out and back is also found in Orson Scott Card's faithful fiction. In *The Lost Boys* a Mormon husband and wife make their family the sure and stable center as they journey into the evil world of dishonesty, power games, sexual abuse, hypocrisy, and humanistic intellectualism. They must find a pathway through a dangerous wilderness. But at the end no one is left stranded. Even the dead are safe at last in heaven.

In his AML presidential lecture Cracroft describes the purpose of mantic writers:

The Latter-day Saint sees as his or her mission the preparation of a Zion people (beginning with their own families) for the second advent of Jesus Christ. Enroute, the Saints must walk by faith, not skepticism and doubt, learning as Brigham Young called it, to be "righteous in the dark." . . . These beliefs, indelibly etched on the souls of each faithful Latter-day Saint, are the home base to which each believing Mormon returns after venturing into the bewildering world where temptations and sins of omission and commission and insistent and persuasive voices and presences cry, "Lo, here and Lo, there." . . . This people deserves a literature grounded in Mormon metaphors, exuding their essences, mirroring their dualistic world, establishing their vision of themselves as pilgrims wandering by faith across a twilight stage, buffeted by the forces of evil, seeking the forces of good, and wondering at the shadows and ambiguities to be found between these bewildering parenthesis in eternity. (53)

### Characteristics of Faithful Fiction

This faithful fiction generally involves:

- an excursion into a strange and evil world and a return to a safe one,
- clear marking of good and evil,
- a heroic figure, usually one who is unambiguously good,
- knowledge that the reader is the hands of a safe and sure narrator,
- a focus on the plotted outcome, on bringing the protagonist back home, rather than on the process of exploring the world, (often miraculous leaps are necessary to achieve this goal),
- simple issues.

### The Rhetorical Purpose of Literary Fiction

The aim of humanistic fiction is equally clear. Perhaps it is best described by Milan Kundera in *The Art of the Novel*:

As God slowly departed from the seat whence he had directed the universe and its order of values, distinguished good from evil, and endowed each thing with meaning, Don Quixote set forth from his house into a world he could no longer recognize. In the absence of the Supreme Judge, the world suddenly appeared in its fearsome ambiguity; the single divine Truth decomposed into myriad relative truths parceled out by men. Thus was born the world of the Modern Era, and with it the novel, the image and model of that world. (6)

While I don't buy into the idea that God has departed, I do believe that in his act of giving us free agency, he has thrust us into a world like the one Kundera describes, where we must sort through opposing truths. In addition, if I assume that Kundera, as a nonbeliever, uses *God* to refer to the human-created authoritarianism which the reformers and Joseph Smith rejected, then I can learn from his proclamation. He writes further:

Man desires a world where good and evil can be clearly distinguished, for he has an innate and irrepressible desire to judge before he understands. Religions and ideologies are founded on this desire. They can cope with the novel only by translating its language of relativity and ambiguity into their own apodictic and dogmatic discourse. (7)

Kundera describes clearly the objective of literary, humanist novelists, which is to face not a "single absolute truth but a welter of contradictory truths" and that the novel is not a "moral position" but an "inquiry" (6).

In *The Giant Joshua*, an example of Kundera-style fiction, one of Whipple's purposes is to explore the difference between principle and practice. This process necessarily shows the cracks in traditions which readers thought solid. Clory's faith at the



beginning of the novel is transformed by her experiences with polygamy into something complex and even vague. The pattern of the novel is a physical and a moral journey away from a sure, stable, and safe place into a foreign wilderness which transforms the characters and the reader in ways even the writer couldn't predict. Instead of one sure voice, we have two or three contrary voices. For many writers--including Maurine Whipple, Virginia Sorenson, and Levi Peterson--the opposing voice is that of individuality, wandering free in a physical wilderness. Like faithful fiction, literary fiction has a moral purpose: through careful consideration of experience, writers observe the deconstruction of unreliable practices and principles and urge readers toward new and foreign universes.

### Characteristics of Ambiguous Literature

#### Literary fiction:

- begins in an unstable world which is slowly transformed around the reader,
- uses ambiguous marking (if any) of good and evil,
- permits no figures to be heroic, uses only characters with mixed and ambiguous qualities,
- constructs its narrative so that the reader expects to be surprised, led into a strange place and left there ("Makes the reader a stranger in a strange land?" writes the marginalized Jorgensen),
- focuses on process and character-centered development, on exploring carefully the way people fall in love, sin, and survive.

### A Metaphor

Neither kind of literature has absolutely pure examples. No literature perfectly entertains the stranger; no literature secures the home culture unchanged. Faithful fiction which allows no excursion into the unfamiliar world has no tension; humanistic fiction which allows no firm framework is valueless, has no moral center. Each type is beneficially polluted by the other.

How can we think about these two rhetorical impulses? Consider a metaphor: Vernon, Utah, my tiny home town, possesses orderly, tree-lined streets, and fenced fields. The community has a store, a post office, a school, and a meetinghouse, all of which serve to bring people together economically, socially, religiously. Outside the town is a bar which serves a similar communal function. A couple dozen times a year as I grew up, my father and sisters drove forty miles west to my father's ranch, outside any community. I knew the pleasure of leaving town and traveling to the beautiful, isolated desert and the pleasure of returning to the comforts of home and town.

A photograph from an airplane of any small Mormon community would show the first tendency, that of gathering together to create a pocket of order in the wilderness. The towns are laid out in

blocks, no matter what shape the valley or hill they inhabit. The first settlers planted trees or even grass, sometimes built walls and fortifications, and laid out fields in patterns--psychologically establishing a boundary between town and wilderness, the familiar and the strange. But this aerial map would also demonstrate the opposite tendency. Scattered around these towns are ranch houses, some at tremendous distances from other people. Farther out are the shacks of desert hermits.

Despite their choice of location for their home, both kinds of people feel a tension. Every town-dweller desires to get as much distance as possible between herself and her neighbor; every desert-rat dreams of a trip to town. In every person's soul and in the history of every Mormon town, this dualistic pull is exhibited. We'd die if either impulse took over.

Although both tendencies exist in every story ever written, faithful fiction wants to deliver the true voice of the community and literary fiction evokes the voice of the stranger, the visitor from the wilderness. As Leslie Norris said in his Maeser lecture at BYU, especially in fiction there must needs be opposition. Neither faithful nor ambiguous fiction can survive without the other to work against; but, like sisters in a single bedroom, both remain convinced that they'd like to try.

### Critical Exploration of the Two Impulses

My discovery of this tension in my own soul--between the gregarious will to obey and the independent will to rebel, both of which I perhaps possessed even before the gift of free agency--was aided by my study of American criticism, where the same opposition arises repeatedly.

Perhaps Walt Whitman was the first to articulate these two tendencies in American life. In "Democratic Vistas" he issues a call for a national literature based on democracy, not feudalism. ("We shall yet have Miltons and Shakespeares of our own?") This new literature, writes Whitman, should express the national character in terms of two important values: political democracy (working together as a people) and self-reliance (frontier independence). He names these two vistas patriotism and individualism and hopes that dialectically a third will arise from the tension between these two.

In *Continuity of American Poetry* Roy Harvey Pearce writes that all American poetry is Puritan; by this he means that all poets have a compulsion to relate their sense of inwardness with their sense of having a role in the world at large. He says that poets are conservative in wanting the dignity of the community to survive but antinomian in terms of fighting against certain cultural values.

Phillip Rahv in *Image and Idea* divides American writers into palefaces and redskins. Palefaces are solemn and clerical; they view experience in terms of discipline. They write symbolically, allegorically, morally, and according to a "refined estrangement from reality." Redskin writers consider the low life of the

frontier or city. They are naturalistic, anti-intellectual, vital, aggressive, crude; they see life as opportunity and consider themselves one with the environment.

Although I'm certain that a more careful search would produce more examples, my last is Tony Tanner, who in *City of Words*, says that writers have opposing fears--isolation and entrapment. As humans they fear being alone, but also they fear being controlled by community. As writers they fear formal chaos, lack of any patterning; at the same time, they fear forms so strong that their individual, unique voices are smothered.

Mormon writers it seems have both these fears, and discovering this opposition in our own writing places us firmly in the center of American literature.

### Psychological Need for Both Tendencies

As writers and critics we often privilege our human need for either the humanistic forms--which meet our need to question our existence, explore our world more fully, ask "what if," and voice our fear of being trapped in institutions--or the faithful forms--which accept our community of faith, define ways of living in but not of the world, and voice our fear of losing ourselves in the wilderness of doubt. Does the kind of story we hunger after really depend on the kind of person we are (a chicken and egg question)? What if all of us need both kinds of stories?

In an exploratory manner I have postulated reasons why we need both. My ideas come from the study of myths, my own fevered brain, and psychological studies of cognitive and developmental processes. First, a note to humanistic critics and writers concerning why we need faithful fiction.

### Our Hunger for Myth

Recently I read in *Dialogue* an analysis of the Joseph Smith story. On a young men's outing, Edgar C. Snow, Jr., rediscovered the powerful and unifying force of our cultural stories:

While standing in front of a crackling fire, I told many tales, including the discovery of the golden plates, the escape from Liberty Jail, and the shootout at the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum. To my amazement these stories became magical spells holding the gaze of all present. I felt somehow during this ritual of storytelling that we became one organism [in] much the same way a congregation may feel spiritual oneness during a church conference while standing in unison singing "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet." (233)

This is the use of story described by Cracroft. Snow calls such stories "life-affirming" (233). He writes that such faith-stories have the power of living myths, and he uses Joseph Campbell's work as proof of the deep effects of the telling of such stories, which

"reconcile us to the mysteries of existence and awaken our own inner spiritual potential" (234). They fulfil our need to receive "transcendent truths--difficult to articulate--in the form of a story and/or a ritual which is not only easy to articulate, but which explains the ineffable through tangible symbols" (234). These stories awaken in "listeners the untapped powers of the unconscious" (236).

In our telling of the First Vision and the trials accompanying the organization of the Church, we often make Joseph and others into heroes. Snow says that Joseph Campbell's articulation of hero-myth patterns can illuminate why we need to tell the stories this way. He uses language reminiscent of Cracroft's description of the Mormon journey through a foreign world:

The Hero represents everyone in his or her individual quest for personal identity and happiness. The Hero may in fact be an actual explorer who discovers a new world or a legendary character who discovers an imaginary world. For Campbell heroes symbolically discover the inner world of their own psyche and invite listeners to follow their own call to adventure. The Hero's call is a call to leave the ordinary world to seek an authentic life. The trials are our inner fears of self-discovery. The boon recovered is the wholeness of our soul. Our return to the ordinary world with a self-actuated soul inspires others to make their own journey. (236)

Before you rise and shout that Jack Weyland's stories and other popular forms are far from the depth and quality of the restoration story, let me repeat what Snow says about tellers who pattern their stories after Joseph Smith's stories:

New Mormon converts often narrate their conversion experience along the lines of the first vision story and see themselves as bearers of a great boon to a reluctant world. More seasoned Mormons often find that they are spiritually reawakened when they hear the new convert's story of Hero quest and reflect on their own conversion and experience a renewal engendered by the teller of the conversion faith-story. (243)

I suggest that just as someone's conversion story is often told after the pattern of the first vision, faithful fiction is often narrated along the lines of a conversion story. On each of the three levels, the story is told to bring souls into the fold or to secure them safely inside.

This descent in Mormon fiction is similar to that of the first British novels, and it isn't coincidence that both early British and Mormon novels have avowed moral purposes. J. Paul Hunter in *Before Novels* says that the true ancestors of early novels like those of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding are not the romances from which they borrowed structure, but didactic and journalistic

writing from which they borrowed rhetorical purpose. The novel descended from authentic spiritual autobiographies to studies of fictitious cases to the first novels. Both the ancestor and the descendant form had similar writerly purpose and readerly effect, just as didactic and fictional Mormon forms have similar aim and effect. That rhetorical purpose must be taken into account when defining an aesthetics for popular Mormon fiction, but I'm getting ahead of myself.

### The Moral Benefits of Ambiguity

Once in a class, Arthur Henry King described how we experience good stories. He said that he never reads or hears the story of the Prodigal Son without weeping. He identifies with the father's sorrow and joy, the son's lust for experience and his repentance, the brother's industry and jealousy. Why would he weep over words? For the same reason that people feel they've sinned after reading sexual description--we experience vicariously a realistically written story. I've listened to overly mantic readings of the story of the prodigal son which interpret the story according to dogma, assigning the faithful son ownership of the kingdom and the repentant son only the fatted calf, but that doesn't feel to me like the meaning Christ intended. I believe he wanted the story to be realistic, full, and possessing the ambiguity of life. How could he want something so heretical? A few possible related reasons:

First, in a story which is constructed realistically like that of the prodigal son, a reader experiences vicariously the character's anguish. Without the realism there is no feeling of true anguish. Many faithful storytellers--in sacrament meetings, Church magazines, seminary classes, and countless other forums--remove the anxiety and anguish so they won't offend listeners or readers, because reality is often painful. What the reader then feels is half a story; they feel confidence, security, and hope--all good emotions--but these good emotions are sometimes misleading or even dangerous when walking through a wilderness in which rattlesnakes, badger holes, and scorpions wait. Walking, we may need to cast our eyes up to heaven and back to earth in a wary pattern. In a dangerous world we need both faithful and ambiguous fiction.

Second, stories which produce realistic vicarious experience also allow us to live for a time in a stranger's head, an astonishing gift, which helps us obey the second great commandment--to love our neighbor as ourselves. Who is our neighbor? Christ constructs another story full of pain and hypocrisy to show that our neighbor is very much like the stranger Jorgensen wants us to welcome. Reading ambiguous fiction we broaden ourselves; we are given the opportunity to become Christian readers.

And a third reason is that faithful stories, structured to achieve the rhetorical purpose of defining the universe clearly in terms of good and evil, take away from me the struggle of discovering good and evil myself. Ambiguous fiction focuses not on predictable or even desirable outcomes but on the process of struggle; reading ambiguous fiction we practice making difficult

social and moral decisions. Popular faithful fiction, because it focuses on plot and a secure dogmatic structure, gives us the answer from the beginning; nothing serious is brought into question. Reading, I don't learn to make decisions in a morally ambiguous world.

For an extended argument of the moral virtue of ambiguous fiction read Tory Anderson's "Just the Fiction, Ma'am."

### **Our Psychological Need for Both**

What is the soul? It may be that it is more like a net or a channel than an entity, a thing with walls. But growing, we have a need to create and recreate walls which contain a consistent identity. If a person grows without any boundaries, she becomes a sociopath, crazy in some way. How can we grow without mantic stories--stories which clearly define the self, the family, the community? Life also demands growth and change. How can we grow spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually without expanding the walls, inviting the stranger in?

First, I'll try to establish the connection between storytelling and the construction of the self.

### **Constructionist Theories of the Importance of Stories**

Constructionist psychologists have studied the ways stories create social identity. In "Transformations: A Blueprint for Narrative Changes in Therapy," Carlos E. Sluzki says:

Our social world is constituted in and through a network of multiple stories or narratives. . . . This ecology of stories, with different degrees of dominance at different moments and in different contexts, establishes the frames within which we become aware of self and others, within which we establish priorities, claim or disclaim duties and privileges, set the norms for appropriate and inappropriate behavior, attribute meanings and order events in time. (218-19)

This psychologist is simply stating what writers have known all along; our reality is constituted by the stories we tell. William A. Wilson's "In Praise of Ourselves: Stories to Tell," demonstrates that we need a variety written and told stories to give meaning to our lives. M. Mair in "Psychology as Storytelling" writes:

I want to claim much more than the comfortable platitude that stories are a good thing and should be attended to.

Stories are habitations. We live in and through stories. They conjure worlds. We do not know the world other than as story world. Stories inform life. They hold us together and keep us apart.

We inhabit the great stories of our culture. We live

through stories. We are lived by the stories of our race and place. It is this enveloping and constituting function of stories that is especially important to sense more fully. (Qtd. in Neimeyer 226-27)

### Developmental Need for Faith and Crisis

Developmental psychologists have theorized that crisis is essential to the construction of the identity during adolescence. We often think of formation as only occurring in youth; but if souls eternally progress, then perhaps we continue to reform our identities even as adults. Laura E. Berk's chapter, "The Self and Social Understanding," from her child development textbook, summarizes the ideas of Eric Erickson and others who define how identity is formed. In the following description, please note the interplay between stability and crisis:

Erikson believes that adolescent commitments arrived at without a period of inner "soul searching" are not true identity formations since a secure identity results from sifting through many choices and assuming the formidable responsibility of choosing goals and values that fit with the self's strengths and weaknesses. As part of this process, adolescents must not only affirm a set of commitments, but also relinquish some fantasized, glamorous possibilities of what they once thought they would become as unrealistic, impractical, and unattainable. (445)

Both a set of commitments and soul searching, both glorious possibilities and release of those possibilities are necessary for growth of an individual. If one assumes the connection between telling stories and growth of the identity, perhaps both faith-stories and stories which embrace the stranger are necessary for the growth of a whole person.

J. E. Marcia had made Erickson's ideas specific and measurable. He describes four paths to identity formation, which Berk summarizes:

*Identity achievement.* These individuals have already experienced a period of crisis and decision making and now manifest a secure sense of commitment to an occupation or ideology.

*Moratorium.* The word moratorium refers to a temporary delay or holding pattern. These individuals have suspended definite commitments while they go through an identity crisis, searching for an appropriate occupation and ideology in which to make a positive self-investment.

*Identity foreclosure.* Like identity-achieved individuals, foreclosed young people have committed themselves to occupational and ideological positions. However they have avoided a period of crisis and have,

instead, reached a premature commitment to a ready-made identity that authority figures (usually parents) have formulated for them.

*Identity diffusion.* These individuals differ from the three identity statuses described above in that they do not have firm occupational or ideological commitments and are not actively trying to reach them. Diffused adolescents are characterized by a lack of direction. They may have never experienced an identity crisis, or they may have had a period of crisis that they could not resolve. (446)

If the stories we tell ourselves come from the stories we hear and read, then these four pathways to identity could describe four different types of readers (a stretch, I admit). "Identity foreclosure" might describe an individual who has never read literature which teaches her how to feed and clothe the stranger in herself. She has only read or listened to mono-voiced or authoritarian stories. The last pathway, "identity diffusion," might fit a person who has only read ambiguous literature. This individual may have no secure feeling in a community. The communal values were never communicated to him through the telling of communally stable stories.

The first pathway, "identity achievement," is a healthful balance of commitment and crisis. It may describe people who have experienced tendencies toward community in faithful fiction and who have experienced doubt through stories which embrace the stranger. The second category, "moratorium," simply describes people who have not yet made up their minds. They have not committed prematurely and they have not rejected commitment.

Another way we may use stories is in the development of perspective-taking skills (the ability to see from another's perspective, an action which much if not all literature is intimately involved with) and with the development of social problem-solving skills. Novels by Jane Austen, George Eliot, and many Mormon authors are written like manuals for the development of these two skills.

Certainly the above connection constitutes proof in only the vaguest sense, but my intention here is to sketch possible areas for future study.

### An Aesthetics

One final consideration. If we assume that both faithful and literary fiction are necessary, must we assume that all examples of both are good? As critics we have spent much of our effort improving literary fiction, but perhaps, even when judged on their own terms, fewer examples of high quality mantic literature exist. What then is the role of analytical criticism with regard to faithful fiction and spiritual criticism of humanistic stories?

My goal here is not to write a definitive Mormon aesthetics; even if I were capable of such a task, too many others have already



done the work. In addition to articles by Bruce Jorgensen, William Mulder, Eugene England, Edward Geary, and many others, note Gideon Burton's August 1993 Sunstone Symposium paper "The Role of Literature in Building Zion." My goal instead is to suggest that the principles of any aesthetics must recognize that the two kinds of writing have divergent rhetorical purposes. Here are a few directions for possible exploration:

- Popular Mormon fiction draws pattern and convention from national models of popular forms, but it should also draw structure from conversion stories and the Joseph Smith stories. Critics can sharpen and tighten the connections to these stories which are the basis of our culture and religion.
- Faithful literature should be built around a clear and singular voice. But how should this clear and singular voice be defined? Determining it should not be according to a touchstone or seerstone, but through ongoing open discussion about communal values. Criticism is the forum where this discussion can take place. Critics can demonstrate the implications of listening to a voice which they consider muddled. For example, the novel *Paradise Vue* uses all kinds of Mormon jargon but the attitudes expressed in the resolution degrade women. The book portrays as positive women who make integrity-destroying choices merely to keep or get a man.
- Ambiguous Mormon literature could concern itself with more intimate consideration of spiritual struggle. We can look more seriously to our own spiritual struggles and strive to discover ways of expressing the unseen in a rational medium. We have long used Flannery O'Connor as a model, but we can turn to other Christian writers for frameworks. For example Kierkegaard's "The Sickness unto Death," says that true Christians fear not pain and death but the second death, separation from God. He describes dozens of ways people separate themselves from their true selves before God. We could have more fiction which shows people struggling with the second death. I'm not talking about "revolving door" fiction; nearly every Mormon has considered with respect and fear her own alienation from God.

### Looking Back at the Field

In order to cover ground, I haven't sunk my plow deep; but I hope I've turned up some interesting possibilities for more work. The stories I treasure come from both faithful and literary sources: the expanse and anguish of *The Giant Joshua*, the pathos of pioneer stories which always make me weep, the image of Joseph Smith kneeling in the sacred grove with his face raised to heaven or standing with his head bowed in Liberty Jail, the humor and humanity of Levi Peterson's Cowboy Jesus, the determination of a

boy who would ride his bike a hundred miles to help his friend in Weyland's Sara, *Whenever I Hear Your Name*. I want all of these stories.

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## THE MORMON FICTION MISSION

*Tessa Meyer Santiago\**

As Latter-day Saints, we are under obligation to fulfill three specific missions: perfecting the Saints, spreading the gospel, and redeeming the dead. As LDS writers, we add a particular covenant and mission to "the word made flesh" (England, "Dawning" 135). Eugene England would probably say that our role in the making of the word precedes that of any other literary redemptive mission: "If [we] cannot do justice to the visible world and make of it fictions which are believable, [we] cannot be trusted to bear witness to the invisible world." (135)

As writers, how do we fulfill these four missions? First, the three-fold mission of the church: the work of the ministry requires that we consider audiences outside the LDS experience. Writing to these audiences tests severely any use of "the common metaphors of the Mormon journey"—unless we are so egotistical as to assume that the Mormon journey is the human journey. Writing to the Gentile also questions the notion that only Mormons will read a Mormon book.

Redeeming the dead by the word becomes slightly more problematic as redemption comes only through a full confession of actual events: "inspiring stories and uncomfortable truths about . . . the past" (Quinn 12). This, too, is a difficult mission, just as it was difficult for Ender to confront the truth of the Bugger Queen in Orson Scott Card's science fiction novel. It requires us—writer, reader, and critic—to root out the disbelief and shame in us regarding the discord in our past, to present ourselves and our Church, true and honest to the world.

Perfecting the Saints seems the easiest mission for the LDS writer: writing to a captive audience, about a subject in common, in a supposedly common language with common metaphors for the edification of both reader and the writer. And for exactly the same reasons, this perfecting of the Saints is perhaps the hardest mission for the LDS writer to adequately, truthfully, faithfully fulfill.

Surprisingly, Richard H. Cracroft considers this perfecting of

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the Saints the major, if not the only, mission of the LDS writer. Expressing disbelief that others outside the Church would deign to read an LDS-authored book, he relegates the LDS writer to the position of literary home teacher, placing upon the Mormon writer the restriction of writing only in the metaphors of Mormonism to orthodox Mormon audiences who "cultivate a sense of God in their lives and seek about them the presence of the divine, eschewing faithlessness, doubt, and rebellion—not coddling it—and quietly enduring uncertainty" ("Attuning" 52). He reduces the Mormon audience's literary intelligence to a dismay that not all Mormon books "reflect a Mormon world view with which they can identify" (54).

To live as a Mormon and believe as a Mormon is to be constantly aware of the difference of our view: with the world around and in the soul within. Being Mormon means having to live with ambiguity, between how our life is and how we tell ourselves and others it should be. Being Mormon means living with the constant failure to be perfect and the constant possibility of joy. It means not splitting to some theoretical world away from the human condition with its accompanying experiences, mistakes, weaknesses, and ambiguities—which is, however, what some Mormon fiction, claimed by and written to this general LDS audience attempts to do.

To ask writers to tell the truth as some critics expect of them is to ask for writers as missionaries. The impulse of most missionaries is to speak the truth as best they know how, the truth as they know it. Not more, not less. The fear of most missionaries is to speak false, to speak of more than they know. However, to complicate the missionary's task, we add to the plain injunction to speak gospel truth gained through faith and experience cultural notions about propriety and piety which confuse the message with the messenger: no inappropriate relations with the opposite sex; be in at 10:30; avoid dissension; only an hour for dinner at members' houses, etc. If you are the messenger, it is easier, at times, you feel, even more imperative, to satisfy these proper notions than to tell the truth as you know it.

My official mission voice was about as unauthentic a voice as I have ever used: a cross between my mission president's Star Valley, Wyoming, whine, an East Bench real estate developer's confidentiality, and the local Amway salesperson. A sort of desperately authoritarian steam train listing to the beat of seven-syllable discussion lines. But it was official. It was sanctioned. Sure, it taught false doctrine at times, skirted around the truth, but my shirt was always buttoned, my hair always in place, and I was always polite. If people interrupted me while I was picking my teeth to ask me a question about the Church, I could feel the lights go on, the spiel about to begin. There were other moments, though, when I spoke plainly, simply, without complete assurance, the truth as I knew it. Not as I had been taught it, not as I knew I should know it, but as I knew it. Even then, it was not without risk. Could I tell my mission president that I cackled like a cowardly chicken when an investigator refused to be baptized? Could I share with my companion the fear in my stomach as we reached the

Joseph Smith story, the embarrassment rising to my cheeks at just how backwoods all this sounded? So I raced to the "I knew and I knew God knew, and I could not deny it" and let Joseph say it for me—Joseph, who knew it so much more than I did.

To be an LDS speaker or writer of truth, gospel, or the personal is to take risks. First, the very notion of writing is belittled by a "uniformly accusatory environment" (Anderson 106). Second, the messenger may not sound as or be what she is supposed to be, and thus the message is discredited. See, for example, Gladys Farmer and her collection of short stories, *Elders and Sisters* (Provo, Utah: Seagull Books, 1977). It was "banned by Deseret Book" for not making her "characters less human" and consequently more "equal to the task" (Farmer 1-2). By the acceptance of the male-authored *Under the Cottonwoods* for sale in the same weeks by Deseret Book, it seems Farmer was not a messenger authorized to bear witness of the "uncomfortable truth" she "revealed about Mormonism" (Quinn 12).

Third, the writer's truth might not be the official sanctioned or culturally accepted truth of the general LDS audience. It might be an unwelcome truth, too close for comfort, an insistent reminder that we are also human in this endeavor.

About five years ago, I entered an essay into a writing competition on campus detailing my experience as a young girl with sexual abuse, and the eventual repentance and forgiveness both of myself and the perpetrator. The essay caused some consternation amongst the judges. I read one critique which called it "perhaps the most Christian essay in the competition." But ultimately, the subject matter was deemed unfit for a general LDS audience and the essay was excluded from the competition. President Rex Lee, however, decided to award me \$750 for my efforts. At the time, more worried about paying for my wedding dress than making a stand for all sexually abused women who were part of that general LDS audience, I took the money and ran. But I am bothered now. Particularly in the light of subsequent experiences.

She came to me during office hours a couple of years ago. A freshman honors student, she had been in my class for only six weeks. I didn't know her very well; she was a quiet but fervent student. The previous week's reading assignment had been another of my essays which hinted slightly at the sexual abuse. She asked me tremulously, "You know . . . this line here, does this mean that . . . ." She could not say the words but I understood. "Yes," I said. Through her tears, she said, "I thought I was the only one."

For the next hour, this young woman unloaded to a virtual stranger ten years of silence about her father, the stellar professor on campus, the stalwart temple attender, the award-winning researcher, the family man who had molested her when she was ten years old. She spoke of feelings of unworthiness as she sat in Relief Society lessons about temple marriage. She tried to understand why she felt such anger and such love at the same time. She tried to explain the hurt, the bewilderment as her father continued his apparently approved life in the Church and she fell further and further behind. Most of all, she wondered how God could

let this happen. I knew her questions, I knew her pain, I knew her struggles. I had written my answer, but it was judged unfit for a general LDS audience.

The reasoning might be that the LDS story does not include sexual abuse of a child by its parents. That's not one of the six discussions. The Mormon story does not include divorce, suicide, excommunication, apathy, indifference, fraud, domestic violence, a Cowboy Jesus. The Mormon story is faith, repentance, baptism by immersion the gift of the Holy Ghost, the vision of the boy prophet, a God who intervenes to aid his children. Ironically, the writing of my essay on sexual abuse allowed me to come closer to "the undisclosed center" (Jorgensen 46) of the Atonement than any other spiritual exercise. To find the words to describe the act, the reaction, and the healing was to make whole the events, to seal them up as best I could, and offer it as a sacrifice for the building of the kingdom, to lay it on his altar and wait for his acceptance (Anderson 115). Perhaps that was my Mormon answer to the human question. And in writing it, I had entered into a discussion, a missionary discussion if you will: intimate, private, not the Mormon story, but a Mormon story sharing weakness, trials of the flesh, doubt in the Atonement, the workings of the Savior, the need for forgiveness, the love of a father for a child. It was a story not needed by the general LDS audience but welcomed by a specific LDS reader. Finally, there is no general audience, only readers one by one, as there are converts, one by one.

The fourth reason writing truth is risky for writer, reader, and critic is that truth is uncomfortable, even violent in its capacity to create change. This dynamic is met with great reluctance by a comfortable audience and a comfortable writer. Bruce Young describes the experiences of love and joy as "intense, soul-transforming and thus, not comfortable" (270). I might add encountering truth is one of these experiences. Love, joy, and truth "require some letting go and giving up, and so most people are afraid of them" (270). Receiving, understanding, and writing the gospel is not an easy venture. Christ came "not to send peace, but a sword . . . To set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother. . . . A man's foes shall be they of his own household," his own church, perhaps even within his own self (Matt. 11:34-36). Writing the truth requires each writer to examine soul, conscience, and experience, then commit talent, time, and energy to the building of the image, the rendering of the word in flesh. Receiving this same "truth of the human heart" (Cracroft and Lambert 5) requires the audience to lay upon the altar "their unique idiosyncracies or even weaknesses" (Anderson 114), including their notions of what is proper, what is moral, and what being a righteous people with a mission in this life really means.

This fear of audience, fear of truth and audience intermixing, is what causes most mistakes and, if not mistakes, apprehensions for LDS writers and critics. We write and critique under the impression that Mormon audiences "cannot bear too much reality," to borrow Eliot's phrase. Gladys Farmer, in writing of her experience with *Elders and Sisters*, wondered what would offend the critics the

most: "the 'dammit' [she] had one elder mutter as he ripped his new suit? the mention of competitive pressure to baptize, regardless of the preparation of the candidates? the display of personality conflict between companions . . . or maybe the account of the attraction a member felt for an elder?" (5) Paris Anderson added an apologetic preface to his missionary novel *Waiting for the Flash*: "I am aware a few passages may offend some readers. For this I am very sorry. . . . I have spent much of my life in a sordid world, and many of my friends are dirty people. . . . [I hope] the readers understand these dirty people are not necessarily evil" (iii). Two years later, the judges of the same Christian essay competition awarded another essay of mind, "The Hand of God," which merely hinted at the sexual abuse, through some convoluted metaphor involving a sunset, a place in the winner's circle, describing it as "a moving paeon to the healing power of God seen through nature" (presentation program). Why better because it's "through"? Why is it we rarely write "the world" as it happens: because we're supposed to be "in" it, not "of" it? The tendency to interpret through metaphors, through literary machinations and familiar phrases only divorces us more from the actual and makes our tasks as writers and readers so much more difficult. The less clearly we see this physical world, the more difficult it becomes to understand the spiritual. At times there is so much dark glass, I can barely see at all.

A related fear of the audience that afflicts LDS writers reminds me of my acutest fear on my mission. I labored continually, frantically, under the assumption that should I stop, there would be somebody around the corner who would not hear the gospel. They would suffer in their sins because of my transgression or exhaustion or hunger. Similarly, we believe that should we write about something too real, our words will have the same effect on the reader as my "laziness" supposedly had on my mission. To impose upon a writer, whose writing is her gift, the responsibility that her words will affect inexorably the eternal salvation of another Latter-day Saint, that it is better not to write at all than to write too much truth, is to lay guilt at the wrong doorstep and to prejudice the writer's intentions. What about the injunction that we teach them—members/readers—divine principles and they govern themselves? Apparently we don't trust our readers to embrace our story or us with open arms. We excuse, we preface, we pull punches, we introduce metaphors, we embellish in the fear that our truth and maybe even our testimony will be judged lacking.

Randall Hall's novel *Corey Davidson*, described as a "well-written chronicle of breaking and contrition of hearts following transgression" (Cracroft 56), does just that. It's a novel with a mission about a mission, spoken by a culturally approved spokesperson (Hall is a CES coordinator). Because of these very factors, it falls into the trap of caring too much about propriety, of making sure the actions are cleverly covered up, the reader protected, and the writer absolved of any responsibility for the readers' actions. Consequently, it fails to "make the word flesh."

The novel opens to Corey Davidson, the mission financial



secretary, traveling on the bus to his new city. His new assignment is to be zone leader, but in his heart he carries his secret. In his daily dealings with the finances, he had found himself at the bank "when suddenly her eye caught his" (5). Flushing, he turns away, vowing to return to "the strict visual chastity expected of him" (6). But she writes him a note; helpless he responds, already "haunted by guilt and wondering and dark eyes and the bust of Nefertiti sitting provocatively on his desk" (7) After meeting with her alone two or three times, being "careful to keep his imagination from going too far, for he knew the enormity of sexual sin" (8), he sins. And this is how the crucial event is described:

There, swept into the whirlpool of her beautiful eyes and the eagerness in her soft, desiring voice, he had done what he never had, even in his imagination, supposed he would do. He had done what he had vowed he would never do. And he split himself in two. (13)

Sin is thus presented as a big surprise: He found himself doing things he never imagined, for no specific reason. As readers we like this plot: it keeps us comfortably removed from responsibility in the whole process, allowing us to still keep the vision of "pilgrims wandering by faith across a twilight stage buffeted by the forces of evil" (Cracroft 53) firmly in place.

In relation, sin is not the result of our own doing; neither is the journey to forgiveness. Some will seduce us into sin, and others will seduce us out: Terzhina's whirlpool eyes and soft, desiring voice sucked Davidson into sin. The notion of sin, especially sexual sin, as a female two-by-four which slams upside the head, stunning you before you even knew what you did, rings loudly with the notions of the oldest, most favorite, male sexual fantasy: woman seduces unsuspecting male into sexual sin without his consent. She may, according to Hall, also seduce you out of sin. Christina, who "tried to love [Corey] purely, as a mother or a sister" (146) sucked him back out. She is supposedly a "gracious and intelligent [woman] who befriends him" (jacket cover) but the prose betrays Corey. He watches as she "walk[ed] gracefully, easily, smiling at him, her long white gown clinging to her" (112). He found it "subtly invigorating" (120) to watch her paint. "From time to time she would draw her eyebrows up pensively, and bring her tongue slowly along her top lip; then, quickly pursing her lips together, she would paint for several minutes . . . her lips returning to their fullness" (120). It is this woman, this female Christ-ina figure who paints the world, allowing Corey to see himself with new eyes, who seduces him back to his old world self.

Perhaps the Mormon reluctance to speak of the sin, and thus to speak inaccurately, stems from two notions: one, the admonition of the brethren to not dwell on our past sins but rather to press forward; and two, the reluctance of the LDS audience to view themselves as sinners. The metaphors with which we are most familiar are "chosen people, city on a hill, a peculiar people, saved for the last day, pilgrims in a lonely wilderness, Saturday's

warrior." It is not easy to combine the apostolic caution with these metaphors without producing a peculiar aversion to the discussion of sin, a refusal to see ourselves as sinners which makes the redemptive process all the more difficult, and the writing of that redemptive process almost impossible. Once we, surprised, see ourselves as sinners, the tendency is to beat ourselves with more than enough stripes as if attempting to redeem ourselves.

And so Davidson, in his prideful remorse, finishes the rest of his mission as ZL, then disappears on the last day into the Brazilian countryside, with no more than a terse letter to his parents and mission president. ". . . Have decided to stay in Brazil for a few more months. . . . Do not try to locate me. I will be in contact with you from time to time"(75). For five isolated months, he lives by himself in a small apartment kept company by visions of Terzhina after which "ashamed, he would flay himself with blame, his desire to be with her waning, then disappearing into the weary darkness of his mind" (81). On the eve of his departure, after a confession to the new mission president and a terse conversation with Terzhina in which he asks for forgiveness and she doesn't understand, we find him before the sculptured Christ on Sugarloaf Mountain realizing Christ is real.

If making the word flesh, not proper, is the LDS writer's responsibility, does an "aw-shucks Cowboy Jesus who straightens Frank out by dishing out, while smoking a Bull Durham cigarette, homely counsel about Frank's sexual hangups" (Cracroft 55) fail any less dismally than a marble Christ? Levi Peterson attempts to "find new forms, adequate to the meaning" (Anderson 111) of meeting Christ if you're a backslider, while Hall provides an ending grounded not in Mormon but in Catholic metaphors. Which deus ex machina is more believable: Peterson's protagonist "flushing the urinal, retching, vomiting, then crying" (Cracroft 55) as he realizes the reality of an understanding God or an officially, fully confessed Corey Davidson seeing Christ for the first time on the Sugarloaf as he looks at the statue "offering the possibility of life, of change, of overcoming fear and darkness. . . . and [feels] the gentle wash of peace upon his soul" (188). A cowboy Christ or a statue—which is more troublesome? that some resurrect the Savior in their most personally appealing image or that the most intimate moment of redemption in a novel comes secondhand, through a statue. Which is more authentic, more Mormon?

To strip this book to the bare bones, to uncover the metaphors used which Mormons relate to so easily, is to find yourself, as Bruce Jorgensen describes it, "up against the flannelboard" (45). The story of sexual sin is one told over and over again in priests' quorums and Laurel classrooms around the world and in all classrooms at the MTC, using every kind of literary and theatrical device: chewed bubblegum, ink in milk, crushed flower petals, capable of literary conception only in whirlpools and soft, desiring female voices, and sunsets on beaches.

What some Mormons desire to read more than anything else is a representation of life as they live it. To know that they are not

alone. They do not want to read only "the firm, invulnerable voice of success: the voice in the middle, about setting goals, establishing yourself, and being simply good." At times, they also yearn for "the dark night of the soul and its exaltation" (England, "We Need," 168). They want to be strengthened by writers, true and honest to what they know, not protected by benevolent voices speaking old, familiar phrases.

Ironically, and perhaps with real reason, I must turn to Orson Scott Card writing for the general human audience, for a more truthful rendition of my Mormon condition:

It gave her a chance to brood about her life and whether she was a good wife and a good Mormon and even a good person, which she secretly knew she was not and never could be, no matter how she seemed to others, because none of them . . . knew what she was really like inside. How weak she was, how frightened, how uncertain of everything in her life except the church—that was the one thing that did not change. . . . Everything else was changeable . . . . [Someday she might] turn to face her husband and find a stranger in his place, a stranger who didn't approve of her and didn't want her in his life anymore. DeAnne knew that to hold on to any good thing in her life—her husband, her children—she had to do the right thing, every time. . . . If only she could be sure, from day to day, from hour to hour, what the right thing was. (54)

Why the difference, the sense of recognition? Because of the ambiguity, the lack of interpretation. Because of the attempt to "make sense out of human interaction that includes both the deepest doubts and anger . . . And swelling rejoicing and gratitude" (Anderson 108). Because this passage feels not like a teacher, but like a friend, soul to soul. Ironically, we do that better with nonmembers than with our own kind. Nonmembers need the truth to be redeemed. As missionaries, making real the word, testifying of the other world, there is no other option. There is no expectation, no common metaphor, no shared world view, no appropriate behavior or sense of propriety, no phrases which substitute for actual experience. There is only the truth. But, I sense, should we be brave enough to write our personal, Mormon truth, our audience, our specific, one LDS reader (we don't get in at every door) will pull us to her bosom, crying, like DeAnne on reading Anne Tyler: "I'm just going to hold [the book]. . . . It's an anchor. It's another woman telling me she knows about things going wrong, and I just need to hold the book" (Card 383).

So what are we left with? What kinds of literary missionaries on what kinds of literary missions? We have tender, soft-hearted ward missionaries like Corey Davidson speaking half-truths but in a voice we easily recognize. We have missionaries nobody wants like Levi Peterson, who claims, "This is my place and these are my people" (35). But he never teaches from the discussions, exasperat-

ing his mission president and answering only to the Lord. We have missionaries, ashamed of their meager offering, of their "dirty" lives but willing to speak anyway. We have missionaries unwanted, banned from circulation because they offer a different story. We have "garden, hybrid [and] noxious weed" (Cracroft 52). We have, I suppose, some form of a vineyard in which we must write until the night of darkness.

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HOW TO BE A MORMO-AMERICAN;  
OR, THE FUNCTION OF MORMON CRITICISM  
AT THE PRESENT TIME

Michael Austin\*

In his hilarious short story "Conversion of the Jews," Philip Roth gives us one of the most endearing unimportant characters in our national literature: Yakov Blotnik, an old janitor at a Jewish yeshiva who, upon seeing that a yeshiva student was standing on a ledge threatening to kill himself, goes off mumbling to himself that such goings on are "no-good-for-the-Jews." "For Yakov Blotnik," Roth tells us in an aside, "life fractionated itself simply: things were either good-for-the-Jews or no-good-for-the-Jews" (108). This basic binary opposition, which I have named the "Blotnik dichotomy" in honor of its distinguished inventor, has, with minor variations and revisions, begun to assert itself quite prominently in a number of recent discussions of Mormon literature.

The taxonomies that have come from these discussions tend to dichotomize Mormon letters into separate camps—such as "mantic" vs. "sophic," "faithful realism" vs. "faithless fiction," or "home literature," vs. "the Lost Generation."<sup>1</sup> Each of these pairings suggests that, at the heart of the Mormon literary consciousness, lies a conception that Mormon literature can be simply divided into two essential Blotnik types: books that are orthodox, faithful, inspiring, and testimony building (good-for-the-Mormons) and books that are apostate, faithless, demeaning, and testimony destroying (bad-for-the-Mormons).

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<sup>1</sup>These terms are all in fairly wide use among scholars of Mormon literature. The "mantic-sophic" dichotomy was introduced by Richard Cracroft in his presidential address at the Association for Mormon Letters in 1992. For fairly representative uses of the other terms, see the same author's entry "Literature, Mormon Writers of--Novels"; Eugene England's "The Dawning of a Brighter Day," and Edward Geary's "Mormondom's Lost Generation."

While I am as concerned as anyone with what is good for the Mormons, I am not convinced, given the present state of Mormon literature and scholarship, that the Blotnik dichotomy provides Mormon scholars with enough useful information to justify the taxonomical importance that our recent debates have given it. This is not because I favor one end of the dichotomy over the other or because I want to make the argument that books that might initially appear "bad-for-the-Mormons" are really, upon further scholarly consideration "good-for-the-Mormons," or vice versa. Rather, I believe that the conception of Mormon literature that has emerged from these discussions is too narrow to be useful to scholars of Mormonism and literature. Implicitly or explicitly, conceptions of "Mormon literature" based on these dualities force us to limit our definition of the term primarily to those books written by Mormons, for Mormons, and/or dealing with Mormon themes. Such narrowing of our focus, I will argue here, detracts from the overall effectiveness of the Mormon scholar in the larger academic community.

In a recent *Sunstone* article based on his farewell speech as the president of the Association for Mormon Letters, Richard H. Cracroft makes the following observation about the place of literary criticism in the LDS community:

If we who are Mormon writers, critics, and publishers wish to speak to the Saints, we must speak to them through LDS metaphors. We cannot dismiss or belittle or patronize them merely because we have supplanted their metaphors or because they refuse to set their familiar metaphors aside. This people deserves a literature grounded in Mormon metaphors, exuding their essences, mirroring their dualistic world, establishing their vision of themselves as pilgrims wandering by themselves across a twilight stage. (53)

When I read Cracroft's words, I find myself alternately accepting and disputing his vision of Mormon literature and Mormon literary criticism. I completely agree that faithful Latter-day Saints deserve a literature that will confirm their world-view and justify their faith. With many other Mormon critics, I often find myself objecting to the negativism and faithlessness that often pervades the more intellectually acceptable Mormon novels. I am the last person who would ever feel compelled to cram my intellectual doubt and academic angst down the throat of someone who appears to be living a happy, productive life without them, and I most certainly do not believe that a book must be faithless or negative in order to be good.

However, I do disagree with Cracroft on one major premise: that it is the duty of Mormon scholars and critics to "speak to the Saints," or to work within Mormon culture to foster, encourage, or critique either "mantic" or "sophic" Mormon books. Certainly the vast majority of Mormon readers want faith-promoting books, and as long as they are willing to spend 90 million dollars a year at LDS bookstores, I feel confident in predicting that they will always

get them. However, decisions about what to write and how to write it are functions of market economics, not critical discourse. Great writers have always produced great works, and mediocre writers have always pandered to the prejudices of their audiences—no matter what scholars have written in our obscure academic journals. Literary critics are not, and with very few exceptions have never been, an important direct factor in the production or consumption of any type of literature.

However, literary critics have always been an important indirect factor in the production and consumption of literature. Such indirect influence comes, not as critics and theorists attempt to encourage or proscribe different kinds of literary production, but, instead, as they have used literature as a starting point for commenting on, critiquing, and helping to construct the cultures that produce and consume books. In the past thirty years or so, theoretical discourses such as feminism, Marxism, new historicism, post-colonialism, and ethnic studies have used the tools of literary criticism to build platforms from which to argue that certain groups, subcultures, classes, or peoples should have more representation in, and more recognition by, the larger national or international cultures to which they belong.

The question at the heart of my essay, then, is, Why not the Mormons? Literary scholars and critics now rally around the cries of "tolerate difference" and "celebrate diversity," and we, as Mormons, have plenty of difference and diversity to offer.

In attempting to define the term "Mormon literary criticism," I would like to propose and build on the following three propositions: (1) that the story of Mormonism is a unique, compelling, and largely misrepresented part of the larger narrative of the American experience, (2) that the current conventions of literary theory and criticism are especially well suited for those wishing to tell unique, compelling, and largely misrepresented stories, and (3) that the most important thing a Mormon literary critic can do in this environment is to use the tools of our profession to construct, within the larger cultural context of literary studies, a space for honest discussion of Mormon literature and Mormon values.

In even beginning to answer the question, "What is Mormon literature?" we must concede that Mormonism is something more than a religion as the term is usually understood. One seldom hears talk of, say, Methodist fiction or Presbyterian poetry—at least not in the mainstream press. And those religions that do tend to be associated with a literature of their own—such as Catholicism and Judaism—are generally perceived as religions whose cultural ties are at least as strong as their religious ones. So, imbedded in the assertion that there is such a thing as "Mormon literature" is the claim that we, as Mormons and particularly as American Mormons, represent a cultural entity whose traditions, heritage, and experience deserve to be considered a vital part of the American mosaic. We are claiming, not just that we are Mormons, but that we are "Mormo-Americans," that "Mormon-American literature" should be considered an important part of American literary studies, and that anyone who doesn't think we deserve our own place in the culture is

a vile, repulsive "Mormophobe" whose position should not be taken seriously by an academy that values tolerance, difference, and diversity.

As Mormo-Americans who are also practicing academics at secular universities, we should also be arguing a further point when we talk about "Mormon literature": that students and professors who are practicing Mormons should be able to use university time and resources to research, write about, and teach about our culture and our literature. We must, in short, insist that our employers and our colleagues accede to the force of their own rhetoric and accord us the same legitimacy now enjoyed by other minority subcultures within American society—not because we have been victimized or oppressed, but because our diverse culture and history has something valuable to offer the field of literary inquiry. Such requests, of course, are likely to be resisted; academia has always resisted attempts by any outside group to gain a foothold in its well-protected, ivy-covered walls. The institutes of higher learning did not approach African-American scholars in the seventies, or feminists in the eighties, or gay and lesbian critics in the nineties and say, without any preface, "You may tell us your stories now; we are finally ready to listen." Scholars in these fields have spent years fighting for the right to include their values and perceptions in their academic work, and I believe that our profession is the better for their efforts.

So again I ask, Why not the Mormons? Academia in general has become large and diverse enough to accommodate our diversity; however—and here is the big catch—a successful movement towards Mormon literary studies in the academy requires a substantial number of Mormon scholars who are, first well-trained in contemporary critical theories and methodologies; and, second, willing to admit to their colleagues, students, and peers, not only that they are Mormons, but that their religion plays a vital role in their scholarship, their teaching, and their lives.

I cannot overstate the importance of this first area. Literary criticism, like any other academic discipline, speaks a language of its own—replete with unintelligible jargon and shibbolethic code words. A number of other academics have been able to initiate meaningful discussions of their faith within an academic context—but only after they have mastered the language and the conventions of their respective disciplines. In literary theory, scholars such as Edward Said (Muslim), Rene Girard (Catholic), and even Jacques Derrida (Jewish) have changed the critical landscape by taking their respective religious traditions and combining them, intelligently and unapologetically, with the assumptions and methodologies of contemporary philosophy and literary theory.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup>The religious affiliations of these three major critics varies to some extent. Girard, probably the most religious of the three, published, after converting to Christianity, his monumental and *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Matteer (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1987). Said,



work of these and many other scholars is accepted and admired in the academy first and foremost because it is excellent, innovative, professional scholarship. I firmly believe that any such scholarship—even if it comes from an unrepentant Mormon—can make a tremendous impact on academic discourse.

It is in this second area, frankly, that I perceive the biggest stumbling block to the type of theoretical movement I propose. In order for there to be great Mormon scholarship, Mormon scholars must not only be great, they must also be Mormon—and not just occasionally, incidentally, culturally, or secretly Mormon, but openly Mormon, unapologetically Mormon, and enthusiastically Mormon. It is, unfortunately, fairly easy for faithful Mormons in academia to "pass" as normal, cynical, liberal academics. We look normal, we talk normal, we can pick up and use jargon as quickly as our peers; and, as long as we don't make a big deal about our religion, nobody need know the secrets that we keep hidden in the closet: that we belong to a religious community and culture that has shaped our lives more than most people can possibly imagine, and that we owe more allegiance to this community than we can possibly ever, in rational terms, explain. As long as we can deflect the occasional inquiry about polygamy, racism, or the persecution of feminists and homosexuals in our church, we can go about our scholarly business without ever having to admit to our colleagues that we are really pretty weird. And if we ever get the itch to write about "Mormon literature," we can just dash something off for a Mormon publication that nobody else in academia will ever read and be done with it.

However, this approach will not do for very long. Mormonism has become an important enough phenomenon in American literary culture that it will soon be the object of intense critical scrutiny—with or without the participation of Mormon critics. Unless Mormon scholars move actively and decisively to define both Mormonism and Mormon literature in the larger critical context, others will offer the definitions for us, and we will be increasingly stuck with the professional consequences of belonging to a version of "Mormonism" that we had no hand in defining.

As examples of this phenomenon, I will point to two very different texts about Mormonism published within the past two years. The first, Deborah Laake's *Secret Ceremonies*, hit the *New York Times's* bestseller list in both hardback and paperback and constitutes the only book about the Mormon Church currently available in many bookstores. The second, a much more consequential work, is Tony Kushner's two-part play *Angels in America*, which won

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though not a practicing Moslem, writes about his Islamic heritage and culture extensively in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983) and in *Covering Islam* (New York: Pantheon, 1981). Derrida, without a doubt, is the most difficult to pin down, but he has dealt with his Judaism in a number of works, the most notable being perhaps "Edmund Jabes and the Question of the Book," in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1978).

the Pulitzer Prize in 1993 and Tony Awards in both 1993 and 1994. Laake's book is a tremendous popular success that has influenced the way that hundreds of thousands of bored scandal-mongers will see the Church, while Kushner's play, one of the most critically acclaimed dramas in the last fifty years, is destined to be reprinted, anthologized, and taught for the next fifty. While there are tremendous differences between the two works, there are, at least for my purposes, some important similarities: both works present a view of Mormonism that is, alternately, perceptive and preposterous. Both ask some very substantial questions about our culture that we, as conscientious scholars, need to answer; and both utilize some extremely transparent stereotypes that we, as faithful Latter-day Saints, need to explode.

A final similarity between the two works is that both, in my opinion, should be classified by Mormon scholars as "Mormon literature." I think we do ourselves a disservice when we limit our definition of this term to those books written by and for Mormons. As scholars working to define Mormonism through literature, we need to interpret the term as broadly as possible, so that includes, not only Mormon-authored books that fit somewhere along the mantic-sophic dichotomy, but other books by and about Mormons, Mormonism, or issues of particular concern to Latter-day Saints. As a general guide, I have identified at least five categories of literature that, in my opinion, qualify as "Mormon literature."

### 1. Books by Mormons Written to Primarily Mormon Audiences

This category contains an entire spectrum of literature, from the faithful fiction of such writers as Jack Weyland, Gerald Lund, and the Yorgasons, to the more academic and serious writings of Levi Peterson and Linda Sillitoe. I do not group these writers together because of any similarities in theme or approach to Mormonism, but because they share a single rhetorical intent: to interpret the Mormon experience for the Mormons. These are the mirror-holders of our society; and they help us define, shape, understand—and occasionally critique—our faith and our culture. At some point, I believe, the writers in this category will be the most important components of a scholarly definition of "Mormon literature." Currently, however, books written primarily for Mormon audiences and sold primarily in Mormon bookstores provide much less access to scholarly journals and conferences than other kinds of texts. For this reason—and not because I do not respect and admire many of the writers in this tradition—I have chosen to deemphasize this category in discussing Mormon literature in an academic context.

### 2. Books by Mormons Written to Non-Mormon Audiences about Mormons

Here we find many of the most important and respected books about Mormonism written in this century, such as Maureen Whipple's

*The Giant Joshua*, Vardis Fisher's *Children of God*, Virginia Sorensen's *The Evening and the Morning*, and, more recently, Judith Freeman's *Chinchilla Farm*. Several of Orson Scott Card's bestsellers fit into this category overtly, and many more contain only thinly veiled references to Mormon history, scripture, or theology. These books and authors provide a dual opportunity for Mormon literary critics: They allow us to use very well-respected literature to discuss Mormon values, and they allow us to point to the accomplishments of these writers as examples of Mormonism's contribution to the larger American literary culture. In my opinion, Mormons who aspire to be Mormon literary critics should become intimately familiar with the works in this category and should look for opportunities to include them in both their research and their teaching.

### **3. Books by Mormons Written to Non-Mormon Audiences, Not about Mormons**

Any book by any Mormon writer should be considered fair game for Mormon literary critics—even if nothing conspicuously Mormon appears in it. I say this for two reasons. First, all writers include, in some way or another, their personal values in everything that they write; hence, any book by someone who has been significantly influenced by Mormonism will reflect, in some way or another, Mormon values and perceptions. Second, and even more importantly, works of literature by writers known to be Mormon form a large and demonstrable part of Mormonism's contribution to our culture. For these reasons, the philosophical novels of Vardis Fisher, the mainstream science fiction of Orson Scott Card, the popular Elizabethan mysteries of Leonard Tourney, and hundreds of other books that do not appear to be "Mormon" at all form a large part of literature available to the Mormon critic.

### **4. Books by Mainstream Authors About Mormons**

This category offers the most expansive, and, in my opinion, the most important area of study for scholars of Mormon literature. Mormonism has always been, if nothing else, a very interesting story; and some of the most important writers of the last two centuries have incorporated the Mormon experience into their fiction and their philosophy. Mormon scholars who want to write about the way that Mormonism has been portrayed have access to works by such important novelists and philosophers as Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Robert Louis Stevenson, Jack London, John Stuart Mill, Arthur Conan Doyle, Zane Grey, George Bernard Shaw, Max Weber, Vardis Fisher, Wallace Stegner, Norman Mailer, and, recently, Tony Kushner. Well-written, original, insightful scholarship about these authors is in high demand in the academy right now, and very little work has been done in the mainstream academic press about their relationship to Mormonism. Writing about the way that important authors treated Mormon themes gives Mormon scholars immediate access to the best journals, conferences, and

publishing houses in our profession. If Mormon criticism is to make a mark on the literary landscape, it must be through these established organs of academic exchange—and the authors in this category provide more access to these organs than anything else at our disposal.

### 5. Books by Mainstream Authors That Can Be Related to Mormonism

This final category, ultimately, should provide a way for Mormon critics to look at all works of literature from a Mormon perspective in much the same way that feminism has developed enough critical strategies that feminist scholars can now offer compelling and insightful readings of any conceivable text. In the past ten years, for example, practicing Mormon scholars have written journal articles examining the Mormon connection to Wordsworth's idea of the pre-existence in "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," the relationship between Milton and the Mormon defense of polygamy, and the philosophical objections to Mormon theology contained in Melville's *The Confidence Man*.<sup>3</sup> At its best, literary theory is not merely a way to analyze literature, but a way to use literature to analyze the world. And since Mormonism—like Marxism, historicism, psychoanalysis, structuralism, or deconstruction—contains its own philosophical assumptions and values, Mormon criticism should be able to do more than just analyze texts about Mormons. Ultimately, the goal of Mormon literary critics should be to use Mormonism as the philosophical basis for all literary analysis—and for the social critiques and commentaries that have become literary theory's stock in trade.

### Conclusion

So, what, finally, is "Mormon literature"? A number of contemporary literary critics, daunted by the task of defining "literature," have determined that it is "whatever literary critics criticize." Similarly, I think, the best definition of "Mormon literature" is that it is "whatever Mormon literary critics use as a platform for discussing our religious experience in an academic context." I do not believe that a Mormon literary criticism should be inordinately concerned with situating "Mormon literature" along any sort of Blotnik dichotomy. The tools of our profession provide us with ample opportunity to turn any relevant text—from the most mantic sacrament meeting poem to the most sophic anti-Mormon

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<sup>3</sup>These articles, respectively, are Rob Paxman, "The Poet as Prophet: The Genesis of Wordsworth's Pre-existence," *Insight* 5.3 (Winter 1990): 7-11; John S. Tanner, "Milton and the Early Mormon Defense of Polygamy," *Milton Quarterly* 21.2 (May 1987), 41-46, and Cecilia Konchar Farr, "The Philosopher and the Brass Plate: Melville's Quarrel with Mormonism in *The Confidence Man*," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 3 (1989): 354-61.

invective—into a useful platform from which to tell our story and construct our religious faith academically. We do not need certain kinds of literature to accomplish our goals, just certain kinds of literary critics—critics willing to become experts in the conventions of contemporary literary theory while, at the same time, retaining their Mormon faith, values, and perspectives.

Not only is this kind of approach important on the level of social construction and cultural criticism, I believe it to be vital to the emotional well-being of many Mormons like me who aspire to be literary theorists. I speak only for myself here; but it has been my experience that, as a Mormon literary critic, I have spent far too much of my life hiding in two equally repressive closets: Among other active faithful Mormons, I have tried to hide the fact that I regularly employ the tools of Marxism, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, queer theory, and other "godless philosophies" in my analyses of literary texts; as a senior graduate student at a notoriously liberal university, I have tried to hide the fact that I go to church regularly, obey the law of chastity, pay a full tithing, and, worst of all, that I believe, on a fundamental level, that Joseph Smith really was a prophet of God and that Mormonism contains that insupportable and oppressive phenomenon known as "ontological certainty."

In attempting to resolve these very real personal conflicts, I have formulated my idea of the ideal Mormon literary critic. It is simply this: The Mormon critic should be one who is a sufficiently dedicated professional to understand and appreciate all of the tools that literary criticism gives us for narrating the stories of a culture, and a sufficiently faithful Mormon to apply these techniques to the Mormon story honestly and unapologetically. This does not mean that Mormon critics should whitewash or ignore the unpleasant features of Mormon history or Mormon life. Like any other large group of people, Mormons are sometimes ignorant, blind, and wicked; but we are also sometimes inspired, insightful, and magnificent. And all of this forms part of the Mormon story that the rest of the world needs to hear. As practicing literary critics, we are in a profession that gives us all of the tools that we need to tell this story. And if enough of us do so and do it well, I predict that Mormonism will become an increasingly legitimate study for Mormon academics in all fields. This, I believe, will eventually allow many of us to work towards a reconciliation between our scholarly selves and our religious selves and will promote an understanding of Mormonism that has always been lacking in our discipline. And this, I believe, will ultimately be good-for-the-Mormons.

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With a few notable exceptions, I have ignored books published by Mormon presses or aimed at primarily Mormon audiences—not because I don't consider such books valuable, but because I feel that books aimed at a general audience are generally more useful to scholars who want to write about Mormonism in the mainstream academic press.

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## THOUGHTS OF A FORMER FEMINIST

*Sally T. Taylor\**

I used to be a feminist. I came by it rightfully because of my mother who spent the greater part of her life in the workplace as a widow with five children and an elderly mother to support. She battled educational, vocational, and social discrimination in the years before affirmative action and equity in the workplace. Through my growing-up years, I heard my mother tell of young male hires who were making more at a beginning salary than she was after her many productive years of service. When my sisters and I went into the workplace, we also saw instances of discrimination and unfairness firsthand.

So why have I quit organizations designed to promote women and raise funds for legal advocacy? Why do I avoid marches for different women's rights, debates on politically correct language, publicity on women's issues, or discussions on pro-choice/pro-life decisions? Part of the answer is that I'm not angry. Nor do I want to be. But the greater part has to do with the changes in focus for women's rights.

My generation and previous generations fought for the vote, for equal treatment in the workplace, and for equal status under the law. Those issues are still viable. If I see incidents of blatant discrimination, I work to rectify those situations. Notice I say *work*. I don't wave banners or make public statements. I move into action—often quietly, but also with determination and (in many cases) results. This is the stance of many women of my generation. We are the traditional feminists who got things accomplished. Public marches, chaining oneself to gates or public monuments, and noisy rallies are other methods of getting attention for feminists. Unfortunately, although these noisy methods for gaining attention make discrimination more visible, they also trigger negative reactions—sometimes with the very people they are trying to influence positively. Through my years of experience, I have noticed that most of the time, the quiet, dignified way is ultimately more effective in making change. Let me give examples.

At one time in our organization, a discriminatory ruling on dress standards for women existed. One of the traditional feminists finally wrote a carefully worded petition outlining the problems

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with this ruling. The petition was quietly circulated and signed not only by many women but also by many supportive men, then was sent to the appropriate administrative personnel. Just as quietly, the discriminatory rule was abandoned. No rallies, no public statements, no marches. But rights for women were strengthened.

When wages for women in our organization came into question, mature discussion from women in appropriate positions influenced the reassessment; and change was initiated, implemented, and completed. Very little inequity now exists. It wasn't marches or rallies or lawsuits that brought about change. It was women working within the channels and behind the scenes. These women, like the traditional feminists nationwide, have brought about the rights we have. They are not laughed at or derided from the curb. They are listened to.

So why do I say that I am no longer a feminist since I am still and will always be one of the movers and initiators of productive change for women? It seems to me that the feminist movement no longer addresses the traditional concern for women's rights as its first priority. Instead, the new emphasis seems to be a drive for power—at the expense of everything and everyone of an opposite viewpoint. This is the new agenda. The issues have also changed. Feminism now seems less concerned with fairness in the workplace and in the courts. Instead, the new movement is toward equity for alternate lifestyles, legal advocacy for discrimination, affirmative action, politically correct language, pro-choice, and focus on victimization. Let me discuss each of these areas from the position of a traditional (or perhaps a former) feminist position.

### **Equity for Alternate Lifestyles**

Because my lifestyle as a satisfied heterosexual puts me firmly in the traditional perspective, I have the most difficulty with this current feminist view. I have never been interested in same-sex sexual relationships. However, I have many, many female friends. I love them as I love my three own dear natal sisters. I enjoy being with them and sharing female concerns, as well as the broad spectrum of vocational, national, spiritual, social, local, and emotional concerns. Our friendship is rich and full. We lunch together, join each other in collegial discussion both in the workplace and in each others' homes, exchange gifts, commiserate on failures, and celebrate triumphs together. But I have absolutely no desire to have sex with them. Our relationships are full without it. And I am comfortable with this position. My generation was one where single women often lived together as roommates without the slightest hint of sexual relations. I would hope that is still the case.

I have read literature about same-sex orientation—mainly about male homosexuality. I know people who live this lifestyle. Despite a survey by Ann Landers in which persons of same-sex orientation claimed to be happy and said they would choose no other lifestyle, frankly, I personally don't see a lot of happiness and satisfaction associated with that lifestyle. In fact, I see much harm—not only

with the spread of disease, but with inordinate focus on sex: on acquiring new partners, on threats to relationships, and on justifying promiscuity. I see much sadness with families who must cope with the alternate lifestyle of children. I see the heartbreak of people whose spouses have deserted them to join alternate lifestyle groups. Yet, those of same-sex orientation seem inordinately driven to justify their behavior and attitudes. I see an intense anxiety to prove that they are happy and satisfied with their chosen alternate lifestyle, seemingly oblivious to problems which are obvious to others. And I see resentment toward those who disagree.

Coming from a solidly heterosexual orientation, I admit that I have a slanted view. I simply don't take the opportunity to run with the alternate lifestyle crowd, so I don't see the individuals who are supposedly ecstatic about their situation. My position is from the periphery—looking in. But what I see is also unshaded by rose-colored glasses. I see broken families, one-night stands, intense sorrow as friends succumb to AIDS, and, yes, incredible selfishness—a manifestation of the me-generation carried to extreme, often uncaring of the health and welfare of partners or of families left behind.

A couple of manifestations of this attitude come in people like Gaetan Dugas, one of the first documented AIDS cases in America who, even after he knew he had the disease, continued to have unprotected sex with hundreds of partners, spreading the infection widely; and another young man (unnamed for the protection of his family) whose favorite gifts to others were pictures of himself, who gave up parents, wife, children, family—all in the search "for himself" and satisfaction of his sexual orientation. I was privy to the suffering of that family—to the financial, emotional, and social privations for many people stemming from his overwhelming desire to do "his thing." Ultimately, he died from AIDS.

However, I know that despite my distaste for alternate lifestyles, many individuals living with significant others are fine human beings. They have many qualities and talents which benefit the world in general and don't deserve the abuse that has been heaped upon them. I decry "gay bashing" or unthinking hysteria about alternate lifestyles. If people living alternate lifestyles are in professions which don't endanger others, then they should lead their lives as anyone else without fear of discrimination or persecution. However, I admit that I am uncomfortable with two problems associated with the gay community: disease and recruitment.

We would have to be blind and deaf not to have noticed where AIDS began and has proliferated. Other diseases associated with sexual promiscuity are also problems in the gay community. The fear of a Typhoid Mary syndrome may be unwarranted, but genuine fear is real, especially since the transmission of AIDS from a dentist to five patients has made headlines. I believe that we will yet learn things about AIDS that we do not know at this time—perhaps very frightening things.

Second, although perhaps some may be genetically or chemically predisposed to alternate lifestyles, I think many are recruited. Like little boys and girls who get an additional kick in doing something "naughty," they become locked into a system of physical gratification that feeds upon itself. Dr. Lorraine Day, former director of orthopedic surgery at San Francisco General Hospital, calls homosexuality an addiction (126). I understand the rationale. Since I sincerely believe that the alternate lifestyle brings with it unhappiness as well as disease, I resent recruitment to such a lifestyle, just as I abhor recruitment to the drug culture, to the gambling life, or to heterosexual promiscuity. I want happiness and life-satisfaction for people. I remain unconvinced that subculture lifestyles which feed on human vice can produce that happiness.

### **Legal Advocacy for Discrimination**

My husband owns and runs a retail business. In his work, he is in the position to hire and fire people—male and female, members of ethnic groups, handicapped, young or mature. His major decision for hiring, promoting, demoting, or firing rests in competence. The people he hires must be able and willing to do the work well. They must get along with co-workers and customers. They must be dependable. Other factors are irrelevant. When he has a male or female who fills these qualifications well, he rejoices and will make all sorts of concessions and incentives to make the work more pleasant for that person. He currently employs a female member of an ethnic minority who is an excellent worker and superb employee. She will never lose her job unless she wishes to move to other employment of her own choice. On the other hand, he has had employees of both sexes who are inept, disruptive, lazy, or dishonest. These employees are encouraged to find other employment. Never has he fired employees because of their gender, ethnic group, age, or physical disabilities.

In my own work experience, I find employers with similar attitudes. Competent women or members of minorities are encouraged, promoted, honored, and respected. Poor workers or workers who cause trouble in the workplace lose their employment. I'm sure discrimination can be found in hiring and firing. I personally experienced one incident of job discrimination which may have been because of gender as I was job hunting. Such discrimination should be examined and reported. However, I am unconvinced that all cases of discrimination based on gender or ethnic minority grounds are valid. As in the case of my husband's business, many people lose jobs because of personal incompetence. It has become too easy to cry "discrimination" when, in fact, the issue is not gender or ethnic minority at all. Discrimination accusations arouse emotional responses which are blind to both sides of the issue. I think that such accusations should be carefully examined with as much objectivity as possible. Then true discrimination will be dealt with fairly, and legal advocacy will take its proper place. But I resent being asked to support funding to "ambulance chasing-type" lawyers who feed off women's and minority groups' anger at imagined



slights or revenge at being fired for reasons unrelated to race or gender. It harms true-cause suits and discredits the system of fairness to women and minorities.

### **Affirmative Action**

A recent article in the *Reader's Digest* by an African American describes his experience with affirmative action. He details his advancements and preferential treatment through this program. His conclusions are very interesting: he is against affirmative action. He has experienced the negative reactions of colleagues who resent preferential treatment because of race. He feels demeaned by simply filling a quota. I agree with his conclusions. If I receive employment or promotion in my career, I want to feel that I have earned it by my training and abilities. I also empathize with this man's colleagues. I want to feel that the new hire or the person working beside me is the best person for the job—regardless of gender, race, age or any other consideration. I want to feel that he or she has earned, by hard work or extensive training, the right to employment.

Some moderate advocates of affirmative action have made the statement that if two candidates were being considered for a position and all other qualifications were equal, the female (or minority person) should receive the position to equalize a long-standing history of inequity. I would agree with that statement if all qualifications were, indeed, equal. Rarely is this the case. But my traditional feminist leanings speak when I assert that no woman should receive discriminatory treatment because her qualifications may be slightly different from the male applicant. Hiring and promoting are difficult businesses. Above all, fairness—both ways—should prevail.

### **Politically Correct Language**

I understand the rationale behind gender-neutral terms. In my classes, I encourage students to replace the male pronoun for inclusive or generic nouns with plurals or "his or her" constructions. Language changes and I do not resist such modifications for clarity. But when the PC movement becomes driven by anger toward males and goes to extremes to avoid using terms which have traditionally included both male and female (mankind, chairman, brotherhood, etc.) or male terms in combinations to describe objects or professions (manhole, postman, councilman) it is absurd. By censoring such terms, we impoverish the language. Most people don't go around with chips on their shoulders waiting to be offended by such traditional titles or words—most of the time spoken without offense meant.

Those who are offended allow anger to dominate their thinking, taking unnecessary problems on themselves. In fact, the other day in a discussion with one of my friends, we talked about the anger in today's society. Many seek occasions to stir up that anger—after all, anger is a stimulating emotion. But anger strikes out at

others and is, again, a selfish emotion. Those who belittle or ridicule others who, inadvertently, use non-PC language exhibit more offense than the language itself gives. Censorship of words, a frightening concept, is acceptable, they think, if they can choose the words to be censored. Yet profanity, vulgarity, and crudity are acceptable. What irony! It is an attitude fostered by hate and anger, not by logic.

The illogical anger causes scholarly papers to be rejected, student papers to be down-graded, and traditional literature belittled—all in the name of a new standard, a standard that is flawed by a power-seeking agenda. Such foolishness has swept educational institutions and publications nationwide. Orwellian fear of what we say haunts the academy. Those who resist are given ugly labels and see reverse discrimination. The unfairness of it is dismissed, yet the ugliness persists.

As a member of a private, religious institution, I perceive that the greatest danger of PC language has been manifest in those students who have rejected scripture because they feel it is male-dominated and male-oriented. At a time in history when Christian principles are in the greatest need, when inhumanity is rampant, when the softening influence of Christian love is almost a lost commodity, the PC movement destroys faith. These students reject all of the life-enriching maxims, the great gospel principles, and the character-building parables, all because "man" or "mankind" is used to mean "people." Coming out of a strong, Middle Eastern patriarchal tradition (or a sexist distortion of the real tradition and setting), the scriptures would logically be no other way, but those who criticize and seek offense see them only through modern eyes. How tragic. The very happiness they seek is being rejected over a few misunderstood words.

I suppose each woman must come to a comfortable position herself if she is to feel a closeness with the scriptures. Personally, when I see "man" or "men" in the scriptures, I know that it includes male and female, and I am content. I think that most women who are comfortable with themselves as females and with the healthy traditions of religion would concur. If the Lord is no respecter of persons, he meant the scriptures for both genders. It is simply written down by scribes from another tradition. Patriarchy then becomes not a sinister movement to dominate and abuse women. It just is a historically common system of order and government. It is no less or more dangerous than any other system, being fair or unfair only to the extent that the individuals who use it are fair or unfair.

In a similar vein, the practice of praying to a female deity because of dissatisfaction with scriptural guidelines seems dangerously presumptuous to me. How can people pray to something they know nothing about? Those who advocate this practice are taking upon themselves a serious and frightening responsibility. They are creating a god to their liking, a god like themselves, hungry for power and adulation. My conception of a mother in heaven is quite different. The paramount virtues I see her possessing are humility, gentleness, self-confidence, and obedience to divine

eternal principles. She knows who she is and is content with her role. I cannot imagine her trying to supplant the Father by desiring her own coterie of worshipers. Personally, I think that following guidelines given by those who are divinely called is much wiser than following someone's idiosyncratic philosophical notion of deity.

Finally, if we were to apply a scriptural injunction to know good from evil—"by their works ye shall know them"—the PC movement would fail the test. Its works produce anger, destroy faith, and divide people instead of bringing all together in a unity with Christ.

### Pro-Choice

Individuals espousing a pro-choice position presuppose that it is a valid position because it means that the individual rather than the government is making the decision. The woman herself makes the choice, this argument, goes, so she can choose abortion or nonabortion. But if she chooses to keep the baby, she has adopted the pro-life position. Therefore, the pro-choice position really has only one option: abortion. The choice is the choice to abort.

The pro-choice/pro-life debate involves highly charged issues. Emotion and bias seem to shove reason off stage. The shrill extremists in both camps accuse each other of not caring: pro-life doesn't care about the lives of the women; pro-choice doesn't care about the murdered babies.

The first issue here is abortion. Most people abhor, or claim to abhor, abortion—both pro-choice and pro-life. Those who try to get around the abortion question use several arguments:

1. What would people do with the babies if they were brought to term? There are too many unwanted children now being neglected and abused.

2. Fetuses are not babies—they're just a collection of cells. They don't become human until birth.

3. A woman should not be a slave to the fetus in her body. Her body is her body.

4. Women should have control of their own bodies. No one has the right to tell a woman what to do.

Although I can't give the definitive answer to the problems associated with pro-choice, I'll give my thoughts on the above ideas:

1. What right does anyone have making a judgment on the unborn? Most children are unplanned—many unwanted at first. But children bring with them an unrealized potential that no one has a right to destroy. Example after example of children born into hopeless circumstances who later show remarkable progress and resiliency can be given, children who become leaders, scholars, functional, and giving members of the human race. In addition, free access to abortion, as it currently stands, has not reduced child abuse or neglect. In fact, statistics show that abuse and neglect are increasing rather than decreasing. As far as I'm concerned, the argument in favor of abortion citing future abuse and neglect is

flawed.

2. It always amazes me that the same people who protest the killing of baby seals and the hunting of whales, or who demand protection of endangered species can turn around and support abortion. What kind of minds can cringe over the deaths of laboratory animals but encourage the wholesale slaughter of their own species? I simply don't understand this kind of thinking. The moment one cell divides into two and begins the process of building a human being, that group of cells is a human being. It is the most vulnerable, innocent human being that exists. And any woman who has carried that group of cells in her body, feeling it grow and move, knows that it is a viable life form. It is greater than seals, or whales, or laboratory rats because it will someday cry, eat, learn, love, laugh, and think just as she does. Those cells may someday take care of the woman who carries them as she stumbles toward the grave. Ask a woman who has miscarried a much-wanted child how real that child was. Just a collection of cells? Hardly!

3. Rather than being a slave to the fetus, the fetus is a slave to its mother. It can become an addict in the womb; it suffers the mother's abuse of alcohol; it weakens with her malnutrition; it is malformed by her illnesses or drugs. It is caged in her womb and cannot escape if she decides to abort. With no say in the matter, it was brought to life by her decision (except in rare cases of rape or incest) and grows only with her consent. The slavery is literal. It is so totally dependent on the woman that it can do nothing without her. How is the woman the slave of the fetus? They are linked—yes. But it is a link of her doing. She has all power over it; it has no power over her because it is her body that controls. Yes, a woman's body is her own (although some theologians would disagree, saying that our bodies belong to God), and she is ultimately responsible for everything that happens to it. She had sexual intercourse to begin the fetus's life. That fetus is the result of a choice she made and is a part of herself; it is the ultimate selfishness, as well as a lie, to say that it is not. To abdicate responsibility for behavior that clearly caused the fetus is more than irresponsible. It is unnatural and self-deceptive.

4. I agree that a woman should control her own body. She should control it well enough not to get pregnant if she doesn't want a baby. That's where control begins. Pro-choice advocates say that a woman should have the right to choose what to do with her body once she gets pregnant—as if earlier choices are inconsequential and as if she is the only one involved in the creation of a new individual life. And yet the earlier choices that resulted in pregnancy do have consequences—consequences that demand responsibility—and she is not the only one involved. Unfortunately, sometimes these "others," not the woman, are the ones who make the decision to abort.

A personal speculation: if the woman truly were the one to chose or reject abortion, how many abortions would there really be? Often the overworked husband, noncommittal boyfriend, embarrassed parent, or persuading friend really make the decision—not the

woman. Actually, restrictive abortion laws protect the woman who is pressured to abort by others. They also serve well to remind both men and women of the serious responsibilities involved in sexual behavior that can call new life into being.

Which brings us to the pro-choice position, which insists that government (or even the church) should not legislate what a woman does with her body. That argument ignores one important role of government: that of discouraging some humans from victimizing others or even from victimizing themselves. Yet, like seat-belt laws for children, abortion laws aim at protecting the lives of those too young to protect themselves; and like drunk driving laws, abortion laws aim at protecting those who are not fully rational from endangering both themselves and others. In part, restrictive abortion laws are there to protect the woman who has a sudden and highly emotional decision to make at a time when she is the least rational. Like the suicide, the woman who suddenly rushes out for an abortion is reacting to seemingly overwhelming circumstances—a permanent solution to a temporary problem. As in the case of suicide, the laws are there to protect women from a rash act that would hurt their families deeply and destroy a valuable life (theirs). Is it so different with abortion? Abortion may also hurt a family deeply and destroy a valuable life (the child's). Women are in no less trauma as they prepare for either experience and no less irrational. Human life is valuable in either case. The decision to end it is monumental, not the slight thing pro-choice advocates seem often to imply. Laws that protect against abortion are laws which protect us against ourselves: against an action done for frivolous reasons (embarrassment, inconvenience, or birth control), which are 93 percent of the current reasons for abortion. No United States law restricts abortion for serious reasons such as rape, incest, and endangering the life of the mother.

Now to the loudly proclaimed reason for free access to abortions: the woman wanting an abortion would get one at a back-alley clinic, endangering her life if she didn't have safe abortions available. Pro-abortion advocates accuse pro-life groups of uncaring attitudes toward these women. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is because pro-lifers care about life that they demonstrate. They know that not only the fetus but also the woman is at risk. Any abortion entails risk. But the risk is not just physical. A woman who is pushed to such an extreme that she thinks she has no other option but abortion needs help. She is in a state of unreasoning panic. She needs nurturing, counseling, support—not a quick abortion. If she does get the abortion, she is in even greater risk. Death from abortion—even safe, clinic-induced abortion—is possible. In addition post-abortion encounter groups are growing exponentially. The trauma of abortion—what women have done by murdering their children—is a subject pro-choice advocates avoid. Guilt, anger, depression, regret, sorrow—all of the emotions associated with grieving are encountered after an abortion (especially a first abortion). They are not emotions to be minimized. Pro-lifers care deeply about these women.

An interesting book which brings this problem to light is

John Irving's, *Cider House Rules* (New York: William Morrow, 1985) the story of an abortionist and his assistant. He clearly paints the picture of the desperation of the women who come to his clinic, the effects of back-alley abortions when they can't come, the reaction of his young assistant who accidentally discovers the body parts of the fetuses, and the post-abortion trauma and hopelessness of the women. The book also doesn't give easy answers, because there aren't any easy answers.

The question, will women go to back-alley abortionists or try self abortion (the infamous coat-hanger) if they don't have access to clean clinics? has yet to be answered. Again, I can't answer that question fully, but neither can the pro-choice advocates. Two thoughts come to mind. Clean clinics have not totally eliminated back-alley abortionists now. Women still die from botched jobs of abortion, perpetrated either by themselves, or by ignorant or careless others—sometimes boyfriends or husbands. Recent demonstrations in NOW meetings of how to perform do-it-yourself abortions add to these statistics. What hypocrisy NOW demonstrates—on one hand condemning amateur abortionists and on the other promoting amateur abortion.

My next thought, sadly, is that some women always have gotten and always will get abortions. But restrictive abortion laws will give some of them time to think carefully about the decision rather than rushing down to the corner clinic. The wholesale slaughter of fetuses since *Roe versus Wade* is a national disgrace. I wonder how many of those million-plus fetuses, if brought to full term would have been discovered to be actually welcome, if not by their own mother, by an adoptive mother. Probably the majority.

Now to the position of anti-abortion/pro-choice. I often hear this argument: "I would never have an abortion. I don't believe in abortion, but I don't have the right to make the decision for others." Such a mock self-righteous attitude fails if you use this argument on any other morally wrong issue: I would never kill, but I have no right to tell others they can't kill. I would never steal, but I have no right to tell others not to steal. And so on. The absurdity of the argument is evident.

The anti-abortion/pro-choice position is the kind of position politicians take when they don't want to offend any of their constituents. Some people call it waffling—agreeing with both positions. In reality, I see it as agreeing with neither. Proponents of this position, in stating that they are anti-abortion, have taken the pro-life position; however, in stating that they are pro-choice, they have taken the opposite—the pro-abortion position. Pro-choice, as a national stance, is a euphemism for pro-abortion. Pro-choice means the liberty to choose abortion. Most use the pro-choice term because it doesn't seem so brutal and heartless. It has a positive ring—as if women were suddenly given power. Sadly, it is only the power to kill.

The bottom line to the abortion issue has been well publicized by the pro-life position. Basically, no matter how you try to sidestep the issue, abortion is the taking of life. It is not just the disposal of unwanted cells. It is the murder of an developing

infant. Morally, it is wrong.

I certainly haven't given the definitive argument in the pro-choice/pro-life argument. I see many problems and few satisfactory answers. My greatest desire is for women to be happy. Moral promiscuity often, if not always, leads to unhappiness. Unplanned pregnancy adds to that burden. Society's treatment of unwed mothers adds another load. Poverty, racial discrimination, drug abuse, and homelessness compound the problems. At the end of such mounting problems, happiness seems an impossible dream. I don't know what the best thing is for women who find themselves pregnant and in dire circumstances. I know that bearing and raising that child bring with it trials and difficulties. I know that giving the child up for adoption is highly traumatic. But I also know that abortion is killing.

I further know that nothing is more dangerous to society—more antisocial—than selfish irresponsibility. Most abortions, I am persuaded, are chiefly manifestations of personal and social irresponsibility. If I have to err in my judgment, I will err on the side of life.

### **Focus on Victimization**

A popular current ploy of various activists is "playing the victim," whether it is because of the inequities of race, gender, handicap, religion, or whatever. When we encounter any of the inevitable bumps of life, we feel suddenly victimized and yearn to disclaim responsibility and demand compensation. I've thought about my own life as a victim—a father murdered, a woman in a male-dominated society, a low-paid teacher (my daughter as a second-year attorney already makes more than I do), and member of a minority religion. Any one of these conditions makes me a victim of society. But I was taught early what to do about being a victim. The first year after my father's death, the Church brought by bushels of food and toys for our Christmas. Mother was gracious but firm. She didn't push the gifts away but let the others know unequivocally that, although she appreciated their kindness, she would support her own family. We were the victims of a horrible act, one that has affected our whole lives. But we learned to put that experience behind us and build on what we were and what we had. The experience made us all stronger because we let it make us stronger.

I have heard of members of minority groups who wouldn't let discrimination hold them down; they fought their way to the top and found there the happiness that achievement despite odds gives. On the other hand, I have seen people so racked with anger at the inequities of society that they are almost dysfunctional. They fuss and grumble and shout and sue. They have not found happiness.

The most dangerous use of the victimization ploy, as far as I can see, is promoted by the feminist movement. Women are carefully taught what victims they are, what victims they have always been through the ages, and that men are always the victimizers. Any inequities of the past, present, or future can be laid at the feet

of men. According to this perspective, the women who say, "I don't feel like a victim," have just been programmed with the "right" attitudes. Being a victim stirs anger, and anger is what the movement needs for fuel. People who are angry go on marches and organize rallies; most important, they donate money to the cause. Victims see inequities everywhere—and they contrive to take them personally.

I agree that life isn't fair much of the time. There isn't a God-given right to fairness. And everyone feels unfairly treated at sometime or another. But feeding on that anger and fostering feelings of victimization is not only irresponsible—it's criminal. It saps the joy from life and traps people in the perennial cloud of suspicion. The only satisfaction comes with mob hysteria—chanting, waving banners, mocking the supposed victimizers. Hate-men rallies evoke euphoria because a feeling of oneness of purpose and comradeship coalesce into an exciting mob reaction, not unlike that felt by lynching mobs of the past. Frenzy replaces reason and good sense. Fathers and brothers suddenly become suspect. Husbands are to be avoided. Women are the only safe allies. What nonsense!

The other day I had a long discussion with a friend of many years about this same subject. I told her that my experience with men was all positive: I have a supportive brother, and although my father was killed long before I had any kind of relationship with him, I had wonderful uncles, a highly supportive husband, loving sons, helpful and kind male colleagues, and fine sons-in-law. She had had the opposite situation. Now divorced, she is suspicious. If any man is even nice to her, she wonders what he wants. I look at my own situation and at my mother's, and I can only conclude from our experiences that we are products of our individual experiences. I have had negative experiences with men, but I have had even more negative experiences with women. My mother had the same. The two most destructive influences in her career were women—women who didn't want her to succeed and tried to undermine her hiring and promotion. The worst experiences in my career have been with women who were untrustworthy and said untrue things behind my back.

I guess the two things I come up with in this section are, first, that we are victims only if we feed on negative experiences and look for inequities. We need to build on relationships and situations that make us better, happier people. And second, our experiences are all individual. I weep for women who have abusive husbands or fathers, whose sons treat them like dirt, whose families are nonsupportive and tear away at their self-esteem. I also weep for men who suffer from the calloused, demeaning attitudes and actions of abusive wives and mothers. But people are not helped by making them feel like victims and feeding their anger.

Much of the anger is stirred by words like "rape" and "abuse" which are deliberately thrown into discussion as catalysts. Clearly, no normal person is in favor of rape or abuse. Most accusations that people are pro-rape are absurd. Yet the word "rape" is often used as a red herring argument to divert attention from other issues and to heat up the discussion. A pro-choice



advocate often tries to discredit someone's argument or stance by making unfounded accusations against that person. They say that the accused is pro-rape (ad hominem fallacy)—regardless of the fact that rape has nothing to do with the issue at hand. When the word "rape" appears, logic disappears and hysteria prevails. The tactic is cruel, underhanded, and unfair. But fairness, it seems, is not a major concern of many modern feminists.

I wish I could easily solve the problems I have addressed in this essay. None of them lends itself to an easy solution. I feel deeply about the concerns of women and men alike. I want everyone to have happy and satisfactory lives. I want people to make decisions that will bring happiness, but I know that many of the problems discussed above do not bring happiness. I bristle at stupidity and racism, at students being misled or fed twisted or corrupt ideas, at people seeming so wrong-headed. I fear for those who are so full of anger that their logic is skewed to suit their political agenda. I worry about the intensity of obsessions with causes, seeing how destructive such narrowness can be. I may love people, but I reject faulty thinking.

So if being a modern feminist means that I must support alternate lifestyles, pro-choice, affirmative action, PC language, and victimization, then I can no longer call myself a feminist. I still intend to work in my own way for the rights of women, so I'm not anti-feminist. But I also intend to work for the rights of men, and children, and unborn infants. So what shall I call myself—and all of those who feel as I do? Maybe, since labels always limit and stereotype, they only apply to people who want to promote division and create enemies. I prefer unity and friendship—I and thou—as equals.

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## PRO-CHOICE? BUT WHAT ARE WE CHOOSING?

### ONE WOMAN'S VIEW

*Mae Blanch\**

Ever since Goebbels, Hitler's propaganda minister, worked his black magic on language, words have been used to conceal rather than reveal the truth. Of course, manipulation of language existed before World War II, but since that time it has been raised to a fine art. Concentration camp brainwashing became reeducation; invasion of a neighboring country, reclaiming lost territory; genocide, ethnic cleansing; and abortion, the right of a woman to exercise control over her own body. (No mention is made that in so doing she also exercises control over the body of the child she carries.)

To call the fight to legalize abortion the pro-choice position is to elevate the moral stature of the claim unfairly. Choice is the result of free agency, a principle treasured by Mormons. Our theology teaches that it was Satan's attempt to destroy our free agency which brought about his fall from heaven. Therefore, any attempt to deny free agency, choice, must be reprehensible. Free agency gives us choice of action, but not choice of consequence. If I choose to drive my Buick seventy miles an hour on highways covered with black ice, in effect, I choose to have the accident that will be sure to follow. And since the stork theory of childbirth has been discarded by every woman of child-bearing age, if she chooses intercourse, she may expect pregnancy. Free agency demands responsibility for choice, not an attempt to eliminate the consequences of choice.

Where no choice has been made, where rape or incest produces pregnancy, then abortion may be a responsible moral choice, one to be made by the woman and those who love her. Abortion to save the

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mother's life or abortion to end a pregnancy which cannot end in a live birth are also responsible moral decisions which a woman may make. But abortion used as an alternative method of birth control or as a matter of convenience should not be graced with the name of choice. It is not choice, it is default.

I understand that some who favor choice, say they do not favor abortion, but I find that argument somewhat disingenuous. When the woman who favors pro-choice *does* choose, how often does she choose life for her unborn child? Pro-choice in practice equals pro-abortion. And legalizing abortion increases the number dramatically. In 1990 New York City reported more abortions than live births. Nationwide, the number of abortions for 1991, a year when abortions declined, reached 4,111,000 or 340 abortions per 1,000 births, a drop from the all-time high of 434 to 1,000 in 1987. Statistics show that in Utah, certainly a state that would rank low in the number of abortions performed, the ratio for 1991 was 104 abortions to 1,000 live births, for a total of 3,759,400 fewer abortions than in 1990 (*Salt Lake Tribune*, March 11, 1993, B-1). Those who argue for pro-choice show an amazing lack of concern about these figures.

But I suspect that in the majority of abortions, the term *choice* does not apply to the woman's decision to abort her child. The choice is not the woman's but that of her embarrassed parents who seek a way out of what they see as an unpleasant situation brought on by their daughter's lack of judgment. Or, even more likely, it is the choice of the man who fathered the child but who is now unwilling to accept responsibility for either the child or the mother.

The situation in Ernest Hemingway's "Hills like White Elephants" has a universal ring to it. The story records a conversation between an unnamed man and woman as they discuss the possibility of an abortion for her. The setting of a small railway junction point, their luggage with stickers from many countries make it clear that they are part of the lost generation wandering the world looking for pleasure. She wants the child and the change it would make in their relationship, although she does not say so directly. He doesn't want the responsibility although he insists the decision is hers. His repeated cry of "I want things to be just like they were; we don't need anyone but us" is a mask for his unwillingness to change his life, to grow up, to think of the child he has fathered or the woman he supposedly loves before himself. He won't even share the responsibility for the decision; she must decide with the knowledge that he will not stand by her if she refuses the abortion. Disillusionment and despair prompt the choice she makes; abortion is not chosen, it is thrust upon her.

Another indication that abortion is often not a real choice can be seen in a news story concerning an organization called the Nurturing Network. Founded by Mary Cunningham Agee, an internationally known business woman, its stated aim is "to provide individually tailored programs of educational and career placement, counseling, nurturing homes, medical and financial assistance" for women facing unplanned pregnancies. Mrs. Agee started the agency in

1983 by selling a vacation home for \$300,000. Over the next decade she recruited 12,500 volunteers from every major city in America and more funds to help women like twenty-two-year-old Beth Sturm Henderson, a nursing student from Boise, Idaho, whose father and roommate offered to share the cost of an abortion because "a baby would only mess up her life." Her reaction to their offer sounds like one typical of many women. "'I set up three appointments and canceled all three,' she said. 'I didn't want an abortion, but I thought I had no other choice.'" During the years of its existence, the Nurturing Network has given 3,600 women a real choice. Mrs. Agee says, "Freedom of choice without real options is meaningless. I spend too much time with women who describe circumstances around prior abortions that had nothing to do with choice and everything to do with feeling they had no other choice" (qtd. in *Salt Lake Tribune*, September 27, 1992, A-1, A-8). The Network has not taken sides in the pro-choice, pro-life argument but exists to help women who do not choose abortion when they have a genuine choice.

But even when the choice for abortion is genuine, I would oppose it because of my religious beliefs. My strongest reason for opposing pro-choice lies in my understanding of the gospel Christ gave us. The most serious sins we are warned against are those pertaining to life—the giving or taking of it. Adultery may give life without providing the nurturing love and care that new life should receive. Murder takes life without any possibility of restoring it. Of the two, destroying life is the more serious offense. I do not argue that abortion is the equivalent of murder, and I don't intend to get into the debate about when the soul enters the body of the child. But there can be no argument that what exists in the mother's womb from the moment of conception is life. Growth is instantaneous; and even before limbs and features are formed, the heart beats. If Joseph Smith could instruct the brethren in Zion's Camp not to kill the rattlesnakes they found there, but to carry them from the camp because all life should be revered, can we really say we believe Christ and countenance the destruction of life, life which is absolutely innocent? We honor Christ as the creator of this world and the life that is in it; we should also remember that he willingly accepted all the suffering and pain this world has ever known to give us the most precious gift godly love could bestow—eternal life. As I reverence Christ, I reverence the life he created, the eternal life he suffered to give us and the life of unborn children who deserve the chance to receive this precious gift. In my view, a reverence for life should make every choice a choice against abortion.

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## DESCENT FROM CERTITUDE

Doris R. Dant\*

I have a grief that doesn't fade the way well-behaved griefs should. I mourn my not having more children. I have two, both girls, both adopted. Judging only by appearances, the world praises me for being commendably unselfish in opting to "bear" only two offspring. Judging by the same appearances, Mormon acquaintances chastise me for being sinful or selfish or, worse, sinfully selfish in "limiting" the size of my family. I mourn.

Why I did not conceive after years of undergoing medical procedures is a mystery. Why I could not adopt more children is not a mystery. Because we were students and my husband was not a citizen, we didn't qualify to adopt through the Church's Social Services. Private, stateside supplies of babies dried up just as we learned about them. For example, a friend obtained a child through her aunt, who ran a private adoption service in Los Angeles. My friend's child was the last one the aunt placed. A Salt Lake attorney and a few local doctors stopped placing children the same year. My cousin learned that her aunt ran a private agency enabling Mexican women to bear their children in the States and thereby make immediate adoption of the children possible. The aunt mediated an adoption for my cousin but soon closed operations; there were no more women crossing the border to provide U.S. citizenship and homes for their unborn.

Finally, after my husband and I finished graduate school and purchased a home, we qualified for a child through our state's social services. Debbie came to us two years later. Three and a half years after her arrival, we welcomed our second "state" child, Rebecca. Unknown to all parties involved, she was to be the last baby placed by the state in our county for several years. Women were aborting the babies they didn't want rather than enduring the dual trauma of bearing and giving those children away.

So I resented the abortions that prevented my having a larger family. But I began to abhor abortion as my daughters' talents and personalities unfolded and I realized these much-loved individuals were both born at a time when they could have been aborted. My Debbie with the model's face and brilliant analytical mind and

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therapeutic insights could have been aborted. My Rebecca with the quick smiles and precise musical ear and soul-sensitivity could have been aborted. And I mourned for those children who never made it to my arms.

I believed I was mourning the results of actions that were more than wrong; they were heinous shades of hellish soot. My beliefs were comfortably lodged on that path of self-righteous indignation and horror the day I listened to a student recount his wife's multiple miscarriages. Oblivious to any reverberations between his story and my plight, I empathized with his problems and rejoiced in the news that he and his wife had finally had a son. To foster the communion with my friend, I shared how ward members reacted to my sister's miscarriage, a miscarriage that devastated her. According to them, the miscarriage was nothing important, certainly not tragic, just a hitch in the process of procreation. After all, they said, the fetus was probably defective.

Without warning, awareness dislodged me. Conversation halted. I realized those ward members were among those who loudly decry abortion as an immoral act or even as murder. But in both instances—miscarriage and abortion—they were discussing fetuses of about the same age!

Now I am unsteady in uncertainty. I stumble off the path of certitude. I am sliding, then lurching down a talus slope of ambiguity, contradiction, and unresolved questions, my arms flailing, at each plunge one foot simultaneously sinking ankle deep in the mountain's rubble and slipping downward. A few loose rocks start tumbling with me, then more and more until the whole talus slope is sliding downward, carrying me with it at an ever-increasing velocity. Down a talus slope of policies and beliefs that bang and crash against each other.

LDS Church policy declares miscarriages should not be recorded on family group records; but according to three Church statements spanning eighteen years, abortion falls, somehow, into the category of "Thou shalt not . . . kill, nor do anything like unto it."<sup>1</sup> Stillborn children, defined as children who were sufficiently developed they could have lived unconnected to their mothers, are not recorded on Church records as either births or deaths; but "abortion is one of the most revolting and sinful practices in this day" (Statements on Abortion, 1973, 1976). Although various leaders believe that stillborn children will be resurrected and belong to their parents, those children still cannot be sealed to their parents; nevertheless, recent Church policy urges "all to preserve the sanctity of human life and thereby realize the happiness

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<sup>1</sup>Val D. Greenwood, in "I Have a Question," *Ensign* 17 (September 1987): 27; D&C 59:6, cited in three Church policy statements: "Abortion Is Considered 'Revolting Sin' by Church," *Ensign* 3 (March 1973): 64; "Church Issues Statement on Abortion," *Ensign* 6 (July 1976): 76; "Church Issues Statement on Abortion," *Ensign* 21 (March 1991): 78; hereafter cited respectively as the 1973, 1976, and 1991 Statement on Abortion.

promised to those who keep the commandments of the Lord" (Greenwood 27; Statement 1991).

Before my feet are knocked out from under me, I sit down to ride out the rock slide. Better my clothes be shredded than I lose all control. Church policy seems contradictory. How can the Church justify denouncing abortion as disturbing "the sanctity of human life" at the same time it doesn't consider stillborn and miscarried creatures to be children worthy of a place in the family?

I end up near the perimeter of the slide where the slope levels out slightly, and I quickly roll off the slide to escape the falling rocks behind me. Rocks rumble past me and disappear over a cliff. When I catch my breath, I teeter to the cliff's edge and stare at the blankness of mysteries below.

One of the Nephis prayed "mightily" for the lives of the righteous, which would be preserved only if the signs of Christ's birth were to appear that day. Even as he pled, Christ, whose body was yet in the womb, addressed Nephi, reassuring the prophet that "on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world" (3 Ne. 1:5-13). Can embodied spirit speak to embodied spirit from halfway around the world? Or was Christ's spirit not yet in his body at the time he told Nephi to "be of good cheer" (3 Ne. 1:13)? And where was John's spirit when his fetus "leaped" in Elizabeth's womb apparently in recognition of the even younger fetal Christ (Luke 1:41, 44)? For that matter, where was Christ's spirit on that occasion?

How can I reconcile Nephi's account with the story of my friend who remembers his life inside the womb, the warmth and comfort and pleasure of it? When contractions started, he was incensed at being squeezed tighter and tighter. Is that memory purely a physical phenomenon of sensations transmitted via an exchange of potassium and sodium ions across neuron walls and of synapses firing neurotransmitter molecules until the sensations reach a specific storage area of the cortex? This version is what a recent issue of the *Scientific American* would have us believe (Fischback). Or is that memory in some way also associated with the spirit's presence in the body before birth?

There must be a way around this cliff. In the twilight, I decide to go sideways along a narrow ledge. Tentatively, I put a foot on it. The ledge holds, but as I put more weight on it, it collapses underneath my shoe. These mountain layers are pre-Cambrian, old and extremely weathered. I will have to inch along, cautiously, to reach the answer of when the spirit enters the body.

Stepping onto another part of the ledge and leaning into the slight tilt of the rock wall at the same time, I spread-eagle against the wall to distribute my weight over as great an area as possible. With fewer pounds per square inch perhaps the rock will hold. I find a handhold. Brigham Young stated that "when the mother feels life come to her infant it is the spirit entering the body preparatory to the immortal existence" (17:143). Another handhold: he continues, "But suppose . . . the spirit has to leave this body prematurely . . . 'it is a still birth.'" That statement does not fit the policies relating to stillbirths and miscarriages. The

handholds crumble, and I push against the wall to hook my clothing onto its projections, taking enough weight that my footholds will remain intact. I reach out again, pushing my fingers into any crack and over any bump that might bear weight. A 1909 First Presidency statement says that the spirit enters the body "at a certain stage . . . and the child, after being born, develops into a man" (qtd. in Clark 4:205). That handhold not only cuts me, it crumbles into ambiguity just as I begin to shift some weight to it. The "certain stage" could be before or after birth. Some Church leaders suggest the latter (Greenwood 27).

I can go no further in this direction. The twilight has faded and the wind come up. I feel about with hands and feet at the top of the cliff until I find shelter of sorts, a level area with the cliff in front, but a rock wall to the north and a yard-high rock to the west to protect me from the direct wind. I can huddle here for a while.

Maybe the Lord condemns abortion for destroying a channel for life to come through, not for destroying life per se. This thought seems to be supported by a 1971 priesthood bulletin which puts abortion in the category of "tampering with the fountains of life" (qtd. in Brough 20). And President Joseph Fielding Smith in a conference address counseled, "We must not dam up the wellsprings of life by preventing childbirth" (50). If "tampering" is the issue, then abortion is no worse than tying a woman's fallopian tubes or using birth control to curb family size. Or maybe such control measures are as bad as abortion. Maybe my initial reaction to abortion's effects on the number of adoptable infants reflects some truths. The cold has penetrated enough to induce violent shivering.

The sky is lit only by faint stars. Not enough light to see further than my hands. The issue of abortion does not seem so simple anymore. Not even my long-term grief can cloak the awareness that, couched in the traditional terms of the culture I was raised in, the issue is full of complexities and contradictions. And the ramifications stretch to the most basic questions of existence on this world.

At unpredictable, chaotic intervals, boulders, unmoored by frost-driven contractions, topple and crash downward. I can't see them in the dark and am almost grateful for my blindness, for I couldn't move far enough or quickly enough to avoid any boulders headed my way. I have only faith to shield me. I pray the boulders will miss me and that I will survive the cold.

If a spirit enters the body only at birth, it is not responsible for setting into motion the metabolic and reproductive processes of cells, processes I had considered life processes. Nor can it have any causal effect on the initial functioning of the heart and brain. But if the entry of the spirit is not what defines life, how can the departure of the spirit be what defines death? I was taught that death occurs when the spirit leaves the body, but that concept isn't necessarily true if the body "lived" before the spirit inhabited it. The body living regardless of the presence of the spirit can account for the out-of-body experiences people have



during traumatic events. But are those experiences just hallucinations brought on by electrical disturbances in their traumatized brains, or were their spirits truly out of their bodies? If the spirits were absent but their bodies continued some life functions, how am I to define life and death in terms of the spirit? Death is defined by some in terms of heart beats and brain waves? Should I define the beginning of life the same way?

Many of my religious beliefs are based on such unknowns as: What is the natural force called faith? How does it operate on nonsentient objects? Are those objects really nonsentient? What is the refined matter composing the spirit? What are intelligences? What were the mechanisms of the creation of man and woman? What is the Holy Ghost? With what matter will our resurrected bodies be composed?

Nevertheless, I thought I knew at least a few specifics concerning my own mortality. I know—at least I have been told I know—the answer to the three most important questions of humankind: Where did I come from? Why am I here? and Where am I going? Those questions, however, assume a knowledge of who, or what, I am. But I do not know who I am, because the questions swirling around abortion sent me slipping and sliding down a talus slope, grasping for bits of brush that gave way in my hands, slipping further, until I was stopped, teetering, at the edge of the great mysteries—What is life? What is death?—the mysteries that prevent an answer to that most intimate question of all, Who am I?, the mysteries that leave in uncertainty even the framing of that question. For should the question more precisely be, What am I?

Desperate for reassurance, I toss a small rock over the cliff to estimate the distance to the bottom. I count silently in mechanical, metronome fashion—one thousand, two thousand, three thousand, four thousand, five thousand, six thousand—and strain to hear the impact. Finally, faintly, an echo reaches me. I am heartened; my faith revives.

Shivering, staring over the cliff's edge at the blankness below, I am also humbled. Without answers, I can no longer be condemnatory. I cannot condemn those still on their paths of certitude nor can I condemn those like myself who have slipped down talus slopes. The moon has risen.

I pull my legs toward my chest and wrap my arms around them to retain what warmth I can. I await the sun. For by the light of the sun, I will see a way down the mountain, perhaps a trail or at least enough sturdy toe- and handholds to reach the bottom intact, to arrive at some answers and walk a new path.

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